



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

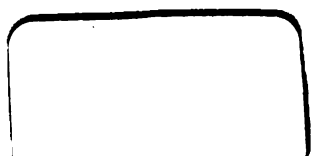
- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

INS
ANT

MARSHALL



9

Marshall

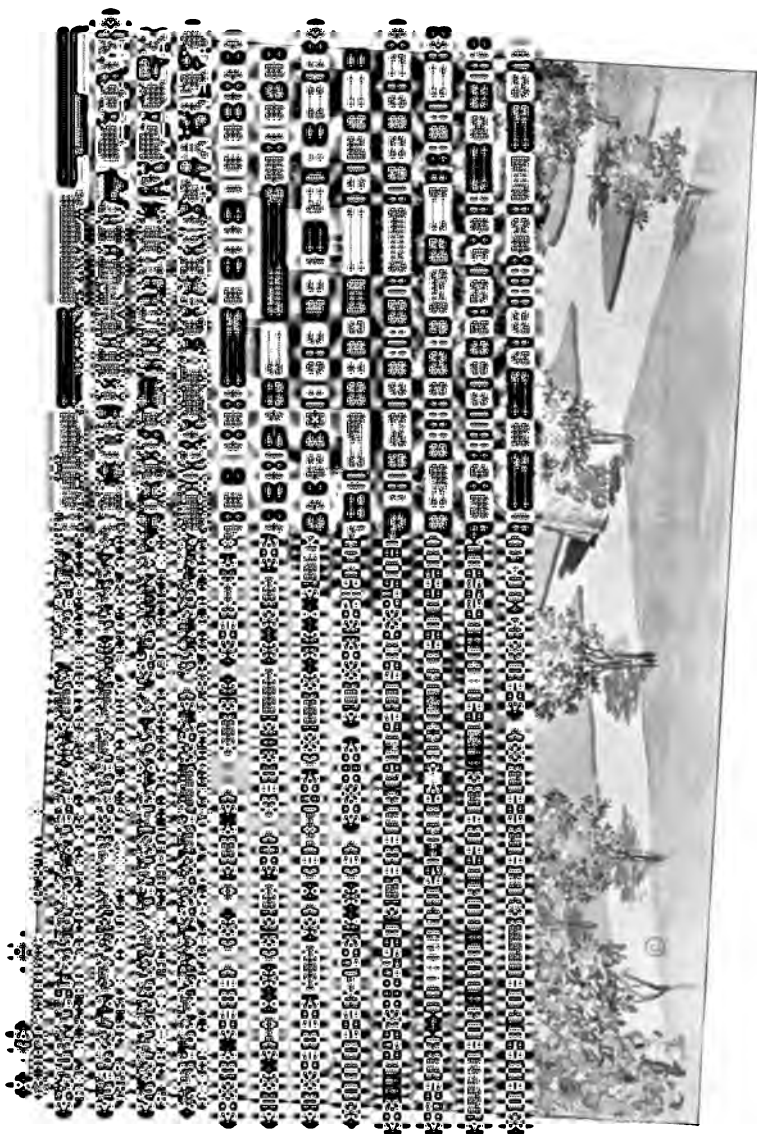
11

THE
QUEEN'S KNIGHT ERRANT

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRAR

ASTOR. LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATION

IN THE ROSE GARDEN AT GREENWICH PALACE.



Net in P.D.
3/10 14-
21

THE
QUEEN'S KNIGHT ERRANT

A STORY
OF THE DAYS OF SIR WALTER RALEGH

74

BY
BEATRICE MARSHALL
Author of 'An Old London Nosegay,' 'The Siege of York,' etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY
T. HAMILTON CRAWFORD, R.S.W.

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON AND CO.
31 WEST TWENTY-THIRD STREET
1905

1913

NEW YORK
LIBRARY
185584A
A AND
L

NEW YORK
LIBRARY
185584A

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
IN THE ROSE-GARDEN AT GREENWICH PALACE	<i>Frontispiece</i>
THE MANOR HOUSE	26
VIDAL MOUNT	50
IN THE INN YARD	82
✓ SIR WALTER RALEGH	110
THE STEPS OF DURHAM HOUSE	158
RICHMOND PALACE	216
THE SPANISH GALLEON AT DARTMOUTH	298

1925

MAR

TRANSFER FROM C. O.

The Queen's Knight-Errant

BOOK I

I

A WAIF FROM THE SEA

MORNING smiled on the red cliffs of Devon after a night of tempest. Before dawn the gale had raged itself out. The inky, storm-rent clouds had dispersed, and now the sun shone forth in full June splendour from a sky of serenest turquoise. The mountainous, boiling sea had subsided into innocent foamy ripples, which gently lapped the long shelving line of beach. In the morning calm and clear sunlight the havoc which the storm had wrought overnight seemed to leap to view at every turn. In the straggling fishing village cottages stood roofless, and fallen stacks of chimneys barricaded the steep little street, with its bubbling stream of fresh water, which rushes down its gutter as merrily to-day as three centuries ago.

The Saltern fisher-folk expected to find no booty amidst the wreckage that blackened the bay with

A Waif from the Sea

the incoming tide, for it was only an Irish barque which, swept from its course in the Bristol Channel to be the plaything of the elements on the open sea, had foundered at last, and gone down between here and Sidmouth. All on board—"a crew of savages," the fishermen were saying—who had risked their lives in vain to save it, had perished near enough the coast for the language in which they cried on God and man for help to be recognized as Celtic gibberish.

Along the beach there passed in the dazzling morning sunlight two darkly-clad figures, in striking contrast to the sturdy, bronzed, blue-eyed seamen, and the brown-legged fisher-boys and maidens, who stood about in groups, and talked of last night's perils. It was the young master of Vidal Mount and his tutor. He had left his steward to count the majestic oaks and elms which the wind in its frenzy had uprooted in his park, and come down to the sea, where he was rarely seen except after a storm, when he came thither from habit, as if bound on the impossible quest of searching among the bodies that chanced to be cast ashore for his own beloved dead.

Some years before, on a sunny afternoon, the boy had seen his parents—of whom he was the only child—set sail in their pleasure skiff, and dance over the green waves never to return. He had watched

A Waif from the Sea

out of sight the little white sail, and his mother's fair curls and gay ribbon knots floating on the soft southern breeze, and the song she had been singing to her mandoline died on his ear, as he turned in anger to climb the cliff path. He had wanted so much to sail with them, but his father had bidden him go in instead and mind his tasks. He had adored his mother, and was always jealous when Sir Gervase took her away from him. She had seemed to him like a beautiful fairy with her joyous laugh, her hair of gold, and rainbow apparel. An hour later when he looked out to sea from the oriel window of the library where he was conning his Virgil for his tutor, Master Birch, he saw that the small feathery cloud, no bigger than a man's hand in the summer sky when he left the cove, had spread into a drifting pall of mist, which enfolded sea and land. A sudden squall had arisen that dashed the fishing-boats back on shore all along the coast ; but the gay little craft with its snowy sail was not seen or heard of again. Since that day young Gervase Vidal had hated and sworn enmity to the sea, though nothing would make him leave his ancestral estate within sound of it for the inland home of his kinsman and guardian, and the merry company of a large family of girl cousins.

His guardian was blamed by some for having yielded to a lad of such tender years, and for leaving

A Waif from the Sea

him to pass a solitary and mysterious boyhood, brought up, without the society of womankind, by tutors and chaplains, who were objects of suspicion in the neighbourhood. Strange tales were told by the country people of the life led in the seclusion of Vidal Mount. Its young master was never seen, like other youths of his years, out hawking, riding to hounds, or hunting the otter. It was said that he passed long sunlit hours in a dusky laboratory, where he watched experiments in alchemy and necromancy, and at night studied the stars. When he chanced to come abroad as to-day, he was regarded as an object of curiosity—almost as if he were a stranger and new-comer in the place. Like his father, young Gervase Vidal held to the old religion, and this alone would have been enough to estrange him from his Protestant neighbours, who had seen the smoke of martyrs' fires darken the sky in the last reign, and held the memory of Queen Mary and her bishops in detestation.

The sea breezes brought no tinge of colour into the untanned pallor of his oval face, round which his dark hair hung in thick disordered curls. He wore a black velvet doublet, relieved by a small tumbled ruff of fine Mechlin lace, and a jewelled clasp fastened a drooping feather to his cap. He carried a book in his hand, which was as white as any girl's. His

A Waif from the Sea

stooping shoulders, his striding gait, the melancholy of his eyes, and gravity of bearing, gave him the air of some youthful Hamlet. As he walked by the groups of bearded Vikings without greeting and left the beach, many turned to look after him and his companion. Master Birch was short of breath and had gouty feet, and his pupil left him a long way behind in their ascent to the flag-staff hill, a breezy sweep of heather and bracken, where butterflies romped and bees hummed, as if there had never been a storm. Gervase Vidal was now on his own property, though a right of way ran through it along the cliffs as far as the mouth of Exe. He seated himself on the jutting edge of the cliff, above the little cove which was so associated for him with the sorrow that had blighted his boyish years, and opened his book. It was the *Steele Glass* of Gascoigne, with an introductory sonnet from the pen of one "Walter Rawley of the Middle Temple."

"Is not this Walter a son of Mr. Raleigh yonder of Hayes?" asked Gervase, when Master Birch panted up to him and sank heavily on the short grass beside him.

"That is so, by his third lady, who by another husband hath bred a Humphry Gilbert. This Walter promised to be of the same venturesome and explor-

A Waif from the Sea

ing spirit. He and his brother Carew learned their Latin in East Budleigh Grammar School, but Walter spent his playtime on the shore. I have seen him sitting on an upturned lobster-pot, with his long chin 'twixt his knees, hearkening greedily, with glistening eye, to the sailors' yarns of new worlds beyond the sea, where 'tis said men may pick up gold nuggets and precious stones by the handful. Strange that they who told the tales returned as poor as they started. Young Walter vowed he'd go to sea and find gold for himself."

"And now he is a poet?"

"Aye, he hath many strings to his bow. He was at Oxford, then in the French wars, and has been fighting the rebels in Ireland. It may be that some of those poor kerns and churls who perished out there last night had heard of the sharpness of his sword."

"When next he comes hither to his father's at Hayes, think'st thou that he would visit the Mount if he were bidden?"

"'Tis not likely that he will come again, for Mr. Raleigh has yielded up the lease of the farm to Mr. Duke, and he and his lady move next week to Exeter to abide there for the future. This will make a second change in that quarter of the country, for 'tis not long since that the St. Clares let their Manor to Esquire

A Waif from the Sea

Christopher Fane, who migrated there with his brood of boys from Exmoor's side this Candlemas. But talk of . . . " Master Birch went on in Latin, "and he appeareth. If this giant, followed by a trio of miniature Hercules and a hound, is not Esquire Fane I am not Thomas Birch."

Gervase raised his eyes with languid interest from the introductory page of the *Steele Glass*, and saw a towering form coming up the pathway which led from the cove to the cliff. He was of the same Viking type, though of finer mould, as the seamen on the shore, with his broad chest, crisply-curling, copper-coloured hair and beard, and clear, sun-burnt complexion. But his russet doublet, trunk hose, and riding-boots, showed him to be of the land, not of the sea. In his arms he held something enveloped in a blanket, which, whether it was child or bundle, appeared to be an object of absorbing interest to the three curly-headed boys at his heels, whose tongues were all going at once discussing it. The little procession drew near, and seemed about to pass by, when, as if struck by a sudden idea, Mr. Fane wheeled round, disengaged a hand, and doffed his hat to the youth with the book on his knees.

"Pardon me," said he, "but methinks 'tis Mr. Gervase Vidal who has the first claim to a treasure that hath been washed ashore on his estate."

A Waif from the Sea

"Nay, father," exclaimed the elder of his boys eagerly, "'tis surely ours by right. 'Twas we saw the raft afloat, and Turk who plunged in and brought it to land."

"And 'twas you, father, who slapped it to life again," cried the second boy.

"And we ran to old Dan's cottage for the hot spiced wine and the blanket, and took her smock to be dried," put in the third.

"'Tis surely ours by right," reiterated all three together, and Turk shook the salt water from his shaggy coat, as if he too would protest against the hard-won prize being forfeited to another.

"Hush, boys, and prate not of your rights when you are caught trespassing thus. I must explain," Christopher continued, addressing Gervase, "that 'twas only when we espied the raft from the top of the cliff, with the human bundle bound thereon, that we ventured to intrude on the privacy of your cove."

Gervase Vidal, who had closed his book and now stood outlined against the blue of the summer sky, bowed stiffly.

"And what may 'it' be," asked Master Birch, "meat, fowl, or good red herring?"

For answer Christopher Fane lowered his burden to the ground, and the blanket opened. Inside was a girl-child of some four or five years old, clad in a single

A Waif from the Sea

garment of finely-wrought linen. Her daintily-formed limbs were still aglow from the vigorous measures which had brought back the ebbing current of life into the small body, but her face was pinched and blue, especially the closed lids, which were fringed with a tangle of lashes as black as the damp rings of jet that curled over her head and brow. Her baby wrists were adorned with barbaric bracelets, and round her neck was a rough-hewn chain, from which hung an amulet and a crucifix.

"A miracle indeed, if this piece of tender thistle-down hath been tossed all night on the ocean and yet hath survived the terrors of the storm," Master Birch said. "A daughter of some hunted Irish chieftain belike, and a daughter too of Holy Church," he added, as the sunlight caught the little silver crucifix. "What sayest thou, Master Gervase? Will you take the treasure to which thou hast the right, albeit these young gentlemen here hold, 'tis clear, that possession is nine points of the law?"

"No, I will not take it," said the youth. "You ought to know me better, Master Birch, than to suppose I would accept a gift from the sea. Besides, what should we do with a woman foundling at the Mount?"

Nevertheless, Gervase gazed at the wonder on the blanket with some reluctant curiosity.

A Waif from the Sea

"We should know what to do with her at the Manor," one of the boys spoke again. "We would fain have her for a sister and a playmate for our baby Rob, withal."

"You are welcome to keep your find," Gervase said to Mr. Fane. "If, as you say, I have a claim to it, I resign that claim readily in your favour."

Yet he still gazed on the blanket.

Suddenly the child made a movement. Her lashes quivered, and the three boys, breathless with excitement, dropped on their knees round her.

"See, father, see. She beginneth . . . aye, she hath opened her eyes," exclaimed all three in chorus. "Such eyes!"

The astonished comment was warranted. They were eyes not seen every day in Devon; indeed nowhere, perhaps, except in the distressful country of much cloud and little sunshine, of many tears and few smiles, and of bloodstained history. Soft grey-blue, as the hills of Erin, they deepened in the centre into black and violet, shining dreamily like mystic jewels in their setting of dark lashes. At first they opened to the sky, then were turned slowly on the surrounding faces, as if searching for a familiar one amongst them. When they rested on Master Gervase their expression changed from surprise and alarm to something that was almost confidence. But the spell

A Waif from the Sea

was broken by the child's big preserver bending over her, and inquiring if the little wench could tell them her name and where she came from. The opening of her lips was hailed with as much delight as the opening of her eyes, but the baby words that came from them were spoken in a language unintelligible to the bystanders. Twice they were repeated, and then seeing she was not understood the poor waif hung down her under-lip and set up a howl of such piercing pathos that Gervase Vidal laid his hands on his ears, and forthwith beat a hasty retreat over the furze and bracken to his battlemented gates, accompanied by his tutor.

The child held out her arms after him, and cried the louder. Christopher lifted her to his shoulder again, and crooned over her soothingly. But she would not be comforted. She wailed piteously as he carried her down the cliffs, and avoiding the publicity of Saltern village took the path homewards through the marshes, along the banks of the little river Otter, the boys and the dog trotting behind.

II

THEY CALL HER IRIS

THERE was something eyrie and sad about the marshlands even at full noonday, with an arch of azure overhead.

The Otter did not reflect the blue of the sky, as did the sea and the eyes of the fisher-folk, but its slow waters were always dun-coloured, and where the weeping willows shadowed them almost black. The high storm-wind of the night had swept over the lowly marsh without felling a flag or a bulrush, and the proud irises swayed unbent in the soft inland breeze that now stole down from the moors. Like a magnet the wailing bundle in their father's arms held the boys, and they kept demurely to the path, instead of scampering, as was their wont, to the water side to capture lilies, and king-cups, and to cast stones at the water-rats. Even a dipper curt-seying coquettishly with its white tail erect in the air, on the buttress of the crumbling, moss-grown bridge, failed to distract their attention from the small dark head pillowed against the gigantic paternal shoulder

They call her Iris

in front of them. A dipper might be rare, but rarer far was a tiny human thing cast up by the sea alive.

"She seemed not to mislike those folks from the Mount," remarked Kit, the eldest.

"She's a Papist like them, I'll warrant," said Hal, "with that Popish toy round her neck."

"Should'st say *was*, not *is*," Kit replied. "Our father will have her reared a Protestant now that she is to be our sister."

"She can't tell us her name, so we must give her one," said Frank. "None of you hath thought of that. Father, what is she to be called?"

"'Tis the custom to call foundlings after the place wherein they are discovered," answered Christopher. "I have heard of a Master Doorstep and a Mrs. Basket."

There was an indignant outcry from the boys.

"Oh, sir! Would'st have her called then Vidal Cove—Vidal?"

"Nay, lads, she shall have Fane for surname, so long as she is ours, if you can devise another to set before it."

The three reflected on the knotty point for a few yards in silence. Then Frank broke forth—

"Methinks, as she came out of the sea, we had best call her after some fish."

"Tut!" exclaimed the others in scorn. "Gurnet,

They call her Iris

Mackerel, Jelly-fish, Crab, eh, Frank? Pretty names for a wench!"

"Well, then, perhaps Mermaid," ventured Frank again, somewhat dashed.

"Mermaid is no proper name; besides, where is her scaly tail withal?"

Frank retired beaten from the lists, and Hal suggested that either Coral or Pearl would be fair-sounding and appropriate.

"She is too pale for Coral, and too black for Pearl," Kit objected.

"But there are black pearls. Hath not old Dan told us how the pearl fishers in the South Seas set greater store on a black pearl than on all the milky ones?"

"Aye, she hath yet to prove whether she be a pearl of great price and above rubies. So best leave precious stones alone, Hal," said his father.

Now it was Kit's turn.

"I would liefer call her by the name of some delightful flower which blooms in this month of June," he said, waxing poetic.

"She's too pale for a rose, too black for a lily," jested Hal.

"I thought neither of the rose nor the lily," retorted Kit; "though, for that matter, some roses are white and some lilies of yellow and red and divers colours."

They call her Iris

He looked at the irises on the banks of Otter.

"'Tis Iris I would fain have her called," said he, "because of her eyes. There's black and purple in 'em, and they somehow are like the iris."

"Kit, my son, methinks you have hit the right nail on the head," Christopher exclaimed. "She shall be Iris. The name is not too phantastic for so strange a little creature. It sits better on her than would Jane, Kate, or Moll, and such like. What say'st thou, my little one," he asked, bending his bearded face low over the child's, "wilt thou be Iris? Iris."

As he repeated the name close to her ear the child, who had ceased wailing, opened her eyes again, and said the I after him distinctly, and then added a second syllable of her own.

"She is like our Robin, and cannot yet speak her /'s," Frank said.

In reality she had but breathed the diminutive of her familiar name, though they did not guess it; and for long she called herself Eily. But being always corrected by those who heard her, she was at last to forget that she had ever been anything but Iris.

The little party quitted the sedgy track and emerged on the roadway beneath a grove of tall leafy chestnuts, and now instead of the plaintive cry of the wheeling lapwings the lark's joyous pæan sounded above them in the blue. Rich pastures and

They call her Iris

meadows, spangled with ox-eyed daisies and lady's-smocks, stretched to the foot of wooded hills rising against the sky in billows of foliage. Here and there among the trees rose a grey church tower or the chimneys of a manor-house, and white farmsteads dotted the level fields.

Their way brought them by Hayes Farm, standing back from the road at the end of a long garden patch, with its two projecting white gables crossed with beams of dark oak, its diamond-paned lattices, pointed porch, and nail-studded, heavy door. Two sheep-dogs lay basking in the sunshine on the flagged path, where a stately old lady, whose hair was as white as her coif and kerchief, was tending the flowers which the storm had beaten down in the borders. The clatter of sturdy footsteps on the road roused the dogs ; one barked and the other pushed his nose lazily through the gate to inspect Turk. At the same time the lady looked up, and though she had but slight acquaintance with the gentleman, who was comparatively a new-comer to the neighbourhood, which she was on the eve of quitting, she greeted him with a pleasant word and smile. Then, as her keen eyes fell admiringly on the three curly-headed, sunburnt boys, she complimented the father on the brave and healthy looks of his sons—a compliment to be proudly cherished indeed, coming from so rare a judge of boy-

They call her Iris

hood as the mother of the Gilberts of Compton Castle, those famous patterns of manly and courageous youth, and the mother of Walter Raleigh, whose feats as a soldier Devon was beginning to take pride in, though his star had not yet risen in its full splendour at Court.

"You have four of them, I hear," said the lady ; "but that is not your fourth son you carry there in your arms, Mr. Fane?"

She looked hard at as much of the black head as was visible above the folds of the blanket.

"No, madam," said Christopher, "this is a little wench that hath been cast up by the sea, having most miraculously survived the tempest of last night, when an Irish barque with all on board did perish out there woefully. She was bound securely to a raft, wrapped about in a monstrous big and heavy green cloak of queer shape, part of which was fashioned to serve as a cushion beneath her. Dan Scadding, who hath traded 'twixt Bideford and the savage coast of Ireland, saith 'tis such a cloak as forms part of the guise of a wandering minstrel in that unruly country. The boys ceased their hunt for gulls' eggs when they caught sight of the raft and hallooed ; though, looking down on't from the heights as it drifted on the fringe of the surfy ripples at the mouth of Vidal's Cove, methought it might have been

They call her Iris

taken easily for a shoal of grey mullet or a mound of seaweed."

"By less sharp observers belike. And you got it ashore, and 'tis alive! An amazing thing in truth," Mistress Raleigh said, and involuntarily stretched a white hand over the palings to draw aside the corner of the blanket which concealed the child's face. "A well-featured, small maid with fine eyes, I'll warrant, beneath those dozing lids with their thicket of lashes. But what are you going to do with her, Master Esquire?"

"Take her home, have her laid abed by the women, and tended till she is entire recovered from the shocks and ill-usage the elements have wrought on her tender body."

"And then send her back, whence she came, to that pitiful island of disloyal and traitorous folk which is ever a thorn in the flesh of our Queen's grace?" Mrs. Raleigh asked; "where it haps at this moment my son Wat is engaged in helping to quench the Desmonds' rebellion and scatter traitors."

The child, whom fate and the winds of heaven had brought thus strangely to the quiet green nook in Devon, the birthplace of one whose path she had crossed in the unhappy country of which the lady spoke, could have told her something of events passing there—of hurtling spears, and dying shrieks; of

They call her Iris

escapes at midnight from burning castles, and flights over bogs, and hidings in the dusky forest. For being cast away at sea and tossed on the breast of the waves were by no means the worst terrors which had befallen the waif. But mercifully the last mishap had washed many a ghastly and lurid picture from the childish brain, though afterwards something in her new surroundings would cause them to leap up and haunt her memory.

"My father will keep her always, madam," said little Frank, looking up with some awe into the wrinkled face of the mother of heroes. "We fain would have a sister, and Kit hath chosen her a name already. 'Tis Iris."

"And a wild Iris 'twill grow up, if I am not mistaken," the old lady made reply in her shrewd, bright tones. "True enow, little men, you all may have her for a sister, but remember when the time comes only one of you may take her for a wife."

She said this with a laugh, and leaning over the wicket touched the little one's forehead lightly with her lips, then turned again to the tying up of her sunflowers and lavender.

Christopher Fane walked on, the waif nestling now comfortably asleep in his muscular arms, unconscious that she had been kissed by Raleigh's mother.

III

THE CONQUEST OF ROBIN

As they entered the courtyard of the Manor, a low, rambling building, with ivied walls, grey stone mullions and the St. Clare escutcheon above the entrance, a shout of triumph greeted them.

"Look at me," cried Robin ; "look at me !"

He was a-horseback on his father's roan mare, cantering up and down the sunlit cobbles, the centre of a rapturously gaping group of stable-boys and dairymaids, his yellow locks flying about his merry baby face as he slashed his whip proudly in the air.

The sight of Robin astride for the first time on a live steed, instead of the painted stick of his wooden hobby-horse, was an event which would have been greeted by his elder brethren with astonishment and delight had it not clashed with the greater excitement of bringing home a maid captured from the waves.

In response to Robin's gleeful "Look at me !" they cried, "Look at what we've got here !" and disappointed at failing to create the sensation he had expected,

The Conquest of Robin

Robin drew rein and allowed a servant to lift him from the saddle.

At first he was disposed to view the object, which he was invited so vociferously to look upon, with grudging interest, as a rival that had robbed him of a triumph. Neither was he pleased to find the thing was not a gull's nest, but a girl. Robin learned his alphabet and his horn-book at a dame's school in Budleigh, where little girls sat on the same bench, and he did not like them. He regarded girls, at any rate those who came to dames' schools from neighbouring farms, as inferior beings—not only to boys, but to horses and hounds. The advent of the "sister," therefore, designed by his brothers on the way homewards to be specially his own companion and playmate, was but coldly welcomed by Robin. He had had no share in the bewildering joy of the morning's rescue; had not seen the fascinating process of revival on the shore, the wondrous first opening of the eyes. What he saw was a bundle with a black head being laid by his father on a settle in the hall, which brought all the serving-women in the house buzzing round it. Even his own nurse, Doll Saunders, was too engrossed with the stranger to congratulate him on his first ride, which a few minutes earlier she had been watching from the lattice in an ecstasy at her nursling's pluck and grace.

The Conquest of Robin

Doll and Mrs. Betty, the housekeeper, had a consultation, and vowed solemnly that ere they carried out the Esquire's order and laid the child in a Christian bed, the blacksmith must be sent for to sever what they called the heathen manacles from her wrists. At the same time they, being staunch Protestants, protested against the "baubles" on her neck, and whilst they were preparing her for bed confiscated both amulet and crucifix, which they cast into a secret drawer in the carven oak nursery bureau.

Father and sons, after their adventurous morning, sat down to the substantially-spread board with colossal appetites. Yet the business of eating did not stop the boys' chatter, which was still all of Iris. At the sound of a lusty cry from up-stairs Hal and Frank dropped their knives on their pewter platters, and would have deserted their capon-pie and rushed to know the cause, but their father declared it was a good sign, that yell with so much strength and anger in it. They might be easy now in their minds, said he, and drink the little maid's health. He stirred the wine-cup with a sprig of rosemary and passed it round, but when it came to Robin he refused to take a pull, though Kit tilted the cup in front of his lips, and said, "Drink to thy new sister, Rob." He shook his yellow curls, and kept his mouth stubbornly closed. Not to please Kit, the brother he revered and

The Conquest of Robin

admired most, because he was the eldest and had been in at the death chasing the wild red deer on Exmoor, and could let fly the goshawk, would he drink to the health of a sister he didn't want. Below the salt, too, the conversation of the servants was confined to the wreck and the marvellous deliverance of the one survivor. Not a word was spoken of Robin's ride, though Jim Mace, whom he had persuaded to mount him on the roan, had said his brothers would be proud to see how he took to horse-back, like a duck to the water, and he would tell the Esquire that he wanted no teaching, but rode by nature.

Even Turk was being made a hero of, and fêted with pigeons' breasts and capon sides, because of the part he had played in bringing the intruder to land. Robin felt aggrieved, and so long as the little girl was kept in the big guest-chamber bed, with its carved eagles and damask hangings, to be coddled with flummery caudles and herb possets, he held himself aloof, and refused to follow his brothers into the room where she lay. They thought him shy, not suspecting that so young a heart could be racked by jealous pangs.

"How long will she be sick?" Robin asked his father, when they were alone together, and Christopher held him on his knee by the wide hearth in the hall,

The Conquest of Robin

where a fire of pine logs had been kindled, the evening being chill although it was June.

"She is not sick exactly, only we must have a care of her till she hath quite recovered from her woeful wetting and pitchings on the sea."

"And then she'll go home to her own father's house?"

"God alone wots where that may be. Methinks this is her home now, and I her only father."

"Then she will tarry for ever and ever," cried Robin, in horrified dismay. "I'd fain she did not. If she hath no home, I'd put her back in the ocean."

"What! Would my little Rob be so pitiless and unkind? Thou'rt different then from thy brethren, who vow already they'll cherish and love her as a sister as long as they live. And I too, Rob, will take her to my affections as compensation for that little daughter thy sweet mother never bore me ere she died."

He was talking now to himself more than to the boy, his blue eyes sorrowfully gazing into the fire. He thought of his lady who lay in the little graveyard far away in the wild brown uplands of Exmoor, and of how, after four boys, she had yearned with her whole soul to give him the girl that was the desire of both their hearts. It was said the anxious longing that the next time she was brought to bed it should

The Conquest of Robin

be with a girl, had caused the distemper which killed her. So it was the sex of the little waif from the sea that appealed specially to Christopher Fane's compassion and paternal tenderness, and made him overlook the prejudices which a Protestant English gentleman of those times was likely to feel towards her supposed nationality and antecedents. He wanted a daughter, and was prepared to accept this gift from the sea, as heaven's belated solace for losing the mother of his boys.

"Now listen, Rob," said he, "to-night when thou kneel'st at Doll's lap to say thy prayers, thou'lt ask God to bless and preserve, not only father and brothers, but the little sister as well."

"No, no," said Robin, shaking his head as vehemently as when the wine-cup had been passed to him to drink to the shipwrecked child's health. "I ask no blessing in my prayers for the wenches at school, and this one is no more my sister than they withal."

A twinkle of amusement chased the sad look from his father's eyes.

"What obstinate resolve in a mere babe," thought he. "I wonder how long it lasteth."

It lasted, Robin's obstinacy, till the next afternoon, and then broke down utterly. The first moment that he saw the little lady up-stairs, whom he had declined

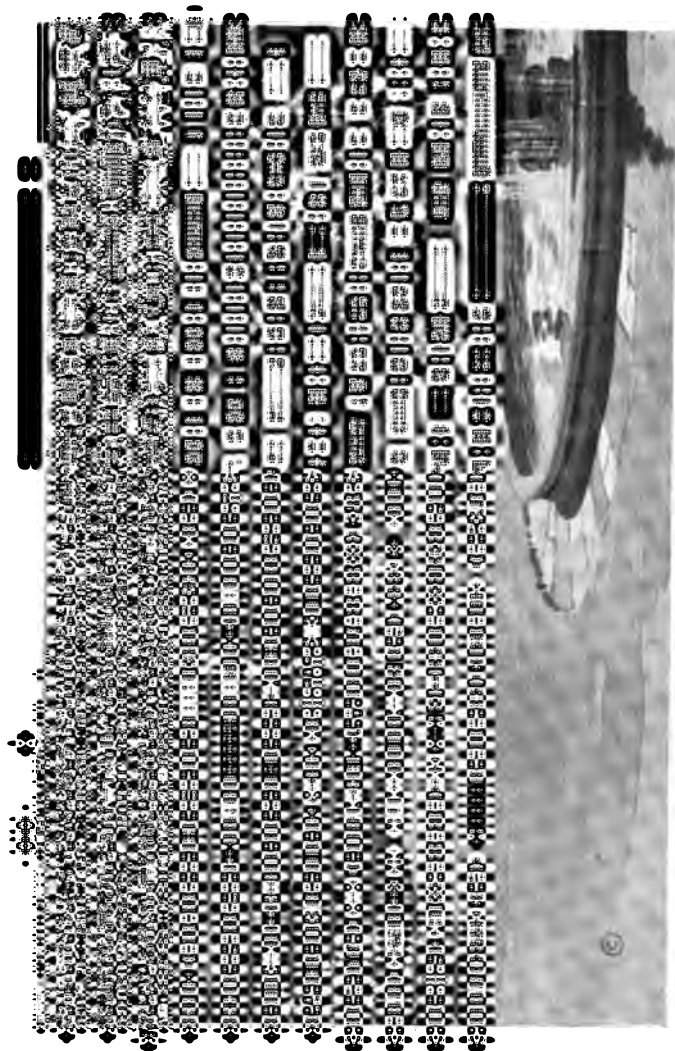
The Conquest of Robin

to look at, drink to, or pray for, face to face, his resentment at her presence melted away. He was taken unawares, and almost before he realized that it was the bundle with the black head who stood beside him, he was willing, as his elders, to be her slave. The sunny hours had sped slowly for Robin that afternoon, while Kit, Hal, and Frank, the midsummer holiday being over, were at school again in Ottery St. Mary, and his father, with Jim Mace, ridden forth to an outlying farm. He had orders to keep within hail of Doll's vigilance, and not to wander further afield than the pleasance and the gardens. A wide yew hedge, clipped into all manner of strange devices, divided one from the other, and a flight of steps cut in the turf led from the flower garden into the herb and fruit garden, where the beehives were and the dovecot.

Turk followed his youngest master desultorily from bees to doves, from white raspberries, flushing in the sunlight, to Robin's own patch of garden beneath the red espaliered wall. Here there was nothing to do, all was trim and abloom, with no excuse for digging, delving, or planting.

So Robin bethought him of the fishing-rod Hal had fashioned for him out of a willow reed, and, fetching it, sat down by the basin of the little fountain in the pleasance to make belief he fished, as Kit and Hal did sometimes in a rushing Dartmoor stream, for trout.

THE MANOR HOUSE.



THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATION

The Conquest of Robin

Thus he sat in the shadow of the house, with its tall chimneys, draped in glossy ivy, standing out against the cloudless summer sky, and the swallows flashing swift as arrows from the eaves above him. The stillness was only broken by the dreamy splash of the fountain, the murmuring of bees, and the cooing of doves, and now and then a servant's footstep on the courtyard cobbles. Noiselessly a pair of bare feet twinkled over the grass, a little imperious hand seized his fishing-rod, and the angler was almost jerked into the water from sheer astonishment. When he recovered his balance he said nothing, but gazed at the unexpected apparition.

Was this a girl—the girl? If so, he had never seen a girl before that at all resembled her. To begin with, she was attired in a night-smock of his own, and that alone gave her an outline different from his little school-mates of Budleigh. And they had not eyes shining like purple stars, nor short, rumpled hair, black as jet; neither had they lips that crinkled at the corners when they laughed. For she who had at first wailed so piteously, and afterwards roared so lustily, was now actually laughing for pure joy at having escaped from bed and Doll into the flower-scented air and sunshine. Horrors by land and perils by sea now seemed forgotten, and to have left no traces of fear or distress on Iris.

The Conquest of Robin

Forthwith she began to prattle in her unknown tongue to Robin, and he, dazzled and charmed against his will, showed her, as he had been shown by his brothers, how to bait a hook and cast a line.

She clapped her hands, then they looked into each other's eyes and kissed.

At that moment Doll swooped down on them, hot and agitated, followed by Mercy Lane, the stillroom maid.

"If she isn't a witch!" she cried. "I turned my back for a minute to go to the buttery-hatch, and she was lying snug asleep; but when I sent Mercy to keep watch by her whilst I was gone, Mercy screamed out that the bed was empty. You could have knocked me down with a feather! How did she get here without any one hearing or seeing, unless she flew out of window? Why, the child's a witch!"

A motion of Doll's stout arms portending immediate capture and re-imprisonment in the dusky chamber, with carved eagles and tapestry hangings for company, instead of Robin and his fishing-rod, made Iris take to her heels. She darted like a swallow down the steps in the turf, and gave the women a chase, first through the cut yews, and then among the fruit trees, and was at last run to earth beneath a sweetbriar-bush.

"What a dance she's led us," panted Doll, "and

The Conquest of Robin

what a rheum she'll catch, thus barefooted and bare-headed."

"Methinks she's hardened to rheums, Mrs. Doll," Mercy said. "If she was out many hours on the sea in the storm t'other night, more scantily clothed than now, she'll take no harm in this heat."

"'Tis just the heat that will do the mischief, Mercy, you goose," answered the elder woman. "Hast never heard of distemper coming from overheating?"

Doll mopped her florid, full-moon face, which certainly suffered in that direction, but the runaway's pale skin looked perfectly cool and unflushed.

And now Robin came up, and flinging coaxing arms round as much of his nurse's ample skirts as they could compass, he implored earnestly that Iris should not be carried off to bed again.

"Why should she lie abed longer?" he asked. "She is not sick. She will cry and kick there. If I were put to bed in the dark when the sun is shining, I should cry and kick too. But here out of doors she doth laugh, not cry. 'Tis hateful to hear her cry; I fain would see her laugh, and teach her to fish for trout."

"Where there are no trout," said Mercy, grinning.

"And this shall shade her from the sun," and Robin took off his wide-brimmed hat, with its heron's

The Conquest of Robin

feather stuck jauntily in the band, and clapped it on the dark head.

“I believe he’s right, my pretty. Naught ails the child now. She is as merry as a cricket. Come fetch my wheel, Mercy, and I’ll spin on the pleasance and let them play.”

Iris understood with her eyes, if not her ears, that Robin had prevailed with Doll, and saved her from further treatment as an invalid. So she came forth from the shelter of the briar-bush, and capered round her champion in joyous gratitude. He beamed with pleasure, and to the delight of adoring Doll and Mercy Lane, unbuttoned his jerkin and threw it round the little girl, so that she should have something more on than her bed-smock.

So the comradeship began between them, which was ordained to grow with their stature and strengthen with their strength ; to be watched and approved by the three elder boys, for had they not said that she should be a sister to all, but Robin’s own playmate ?

IV

THE OLD GREEN CLOAK

A MONTH after the midsummer storm, oaks and elms still lay where the wind had felled them in the park of Vidal Mount. The blue-eyed fishermen, as they gazed out to sea on the dreamy, hot afternoons, were muttering imprecations against young Mr. Vidal, who, it was reported, had given strict orders to his steward that no timber of his should go to Axminster to be made into ships, not even if the shipbuilder offered him its weight in gold.

The boy thus widened the breach between himself and his neighbours, by making a sort of public manifestation of his eccentric antipathy to the sea, at a time when every patriotic heart in Devon, or, for that matter, in England, was aflame with ambition to fight the Queen's battles on the ocean, to sail beyond the sunset, and to add new countries to her realm.

When Gervase's refusal to let his trees be sold for shipbuilding was discussed at the Manor during meals below the salt, the young Fanes gnashed their teeth and raged. The ancestors of the St. Clares,

The old Green Cloak

their predecessors at Budleigh Manor, had been at feud for centuries with the Vidals of the Mount, and St. Clare and Vidal blood had been spilled more than once in private combat. Christopher Fane's sons, young as they were, had shown a desire from the first to carry on the traditions, in this respect, of the house to which their father had brought them from their old wild home on Exmoor. And now, instead of vague gossip, they seemed to have a fact on which to base their dislike for the Catholic, Gervase Vidal, with whom they had no further personal acquaintance than the chance encounter on the cliff path the morning after the wreck.

It was the week when little Saltern and all Devon thrilled and glowed at the news of the return of Francis Drake and his gallant men to Plymouth, on Sunday morning after that most famous voyage of his on the *Pelican* round the world.

Something of the fire of a long-past youth leapt up in old Dan Scadding's eyes, which were not blue but black as coals, and there was a swell of pride in his quavering voice as he talked of this event to the three boys, who on their rambles along the shore could not resist hanging about the gate of the old salt's cottage, despite its close proximity to the Vidal estate.

Dan was the Ulysses of Saltern mariners. He had sailed in southern seas, and been frozen with Sir

The old Green Cloak

Hugh Willoughby among the icebergs; had crossed the Atlantic many times, and fought and plundered the Spaniard in Peru; had set foot on the virgin soil of vast tropical forests, and seen fabulous birds and beasts and strange men whose heads were set hindway before on their shoulders. Nearer home he had traded in spices and sables with Russia, and encountered pirates in the Irish Channel. Whether he had gone as cabin-boy, boatswain, cook or skipper, Dan's expeditions had always been rich in adventure, and afforded excellent material for yarns with which in his old age he enchanted the rising generation. As some years before they had held the boy Raleigh enthralled, so now they awoke in the Fanes the yearning for travel, the hunger for adventure in undiscovered worlds beyond the Atlantic.

Too infirm to hobble below to the jetty, Dan generally held his court at the wicket of his wind-swept garden in which little flourished beside sea-pinks and hare-bells and a bed of pot-herbs, tended by his daughter Moll. "Mad Moll" they called her, yet for all her madness the fishermen's wives and lasses came to her for charms and potions, and her skill as a leech enjoyed wide repute. Moll's lover had been drowned on the eve of her wedding, and she had never been seen to smile since. In early youth sorrow had blanched her raven

The old Green Cloak

hair and prematurely aged her handsome features. Now her nutcracker chin almost met her aquiline nose, and her dark skin was as deeply lined as old Dan's, but her great eyes shone forth from cavernous sockets with undimmed lustre, and it was reported that they could see far into the past and the future, and that many things were visible to them which were veiled from ordinary mortal sight.

Kit Fane and his brothers, fearless boys though they were, shrank involuntarily under the fire of Moll's eyes, and were much more at their ease in Dan's long, low kitchen, which was bedroom and parlour as well, when Moll was absent from her dark corner by the hearth, far away on Dartmoor, grovelling among the tors for some rare herb. Without the restraint of her weird presence they delighted in the smoky, fishy atmosphere, danced and balanced themselves on the coils of rope, handled the shells and the lumps of coral, and examined for the hundredth time the wax model of the *Belle Esperance*, Sir Hugh Willoughby's gallant, luckless craft.

There were tiny model ships, too, engraven on the gold earrings which Dan wore dangling among his grizzily oiled curls, and these fascinated the boys' eyes as they caught the sunlight at every motion of the old palsied head. The earrings were heirlooms, and had come down to Dan from his great-grandfather.

The old Green Cloak

"Glorious Frank Drake! An old man feels proud to-day, and no mistake, to have sailed under his flag. Glorious Frank Drake!" Dan said, leaning on his huge crutch at the gate in his blue watchet jerkin, beneath a vault so deeply blue it was almost violet. The earrings flashed as he repeated, "Glorious Frank Drake." And he went on, "Fain would I have been there to see him come into the church and to shout with the rest a psalm of welcome. A little man he is with a foxy beard and eyebrows. Aye, but great!—a greater spirit never breathed. The cunning of a panther and the heart of a lion hath Franky Drake, and which of ye bears his name?"

"'Tis I bear his name," spoke small Francis Fane, his sturdy chest swelling. "'Tis I; and when I'm grown up I mean to go to sea, and I'll sail with that great Captain Drake."

"If he'll have you," laughed Kit. "Methinks, too, it'll be my turn and Hal's before yours, Master Frank."

"Aye, and so you lads all mean to go to sea and to fight the Spaniard?" asked the old sailor.

"Yes, that we do, except perhaps Rob," Kit answered. "Rob shall tarry at home with father, and ride and let fly the hawk with him whilst we are away, and take care of Iris."

"Yes," agreed Hal, "we'll leave father Robin,

The old Green Cloak

because he's the youngest, and father holds him in such dearness withal."

"And Iris doth scream and weep herself sick when they take him away from her," added Frank.

"Because she is a baby; she won't always be a baby," Kit said.

"But she does not scream after us," Frank maintained.

"So the little castaway still screams, eh?" chuckled old Dan, remembering the piercing yells, and the little hands held out after the retreating figure of the master of the Mount. Slowly Dan wheeled round on his crutch as he recalled the scene, and looked up the steep incline to which his cottage clung like an eagle's nest. Above, on the same spot as on the morning after the wreck, Gervase Vidal was sitting, now with the bulky form of his tutor stretched beside him, and the book which lay open on his knee to-day was *The Shepherd's Calendar*, by the new poet, Edmund Spenser. The boys followed the direction of Dan's glance, and when they saw the black figure casting its shadow on the fair summer landscape they exclaimed—

"He'll not go to sea, I trow."

"And he hath timber enow rotting in his park to build a fleet. 'Tis a shame," cried Kit. "Why doth he so spite the sea? It must be that he is a coward and fears it."

The old Green Cloak

"Nay, he fears it not," said Dan. "I've watched him often take a header from the cove, and swim among the breakers, and many a sea-dog would not do that unless he were bound."

"When the sea is treacherous and swallows up our dearest, we have cause, young gentlemen, indeed to fear and hate it," said a deep-toned, penetrating voice that made the boys start and turn round. Mad Moll had come forth from the cottage, and stood near them on the pebble-path, with the old voluminous green cloak, the only remains of the wreck of the Irish bark, except the living thing it had wrapped about, slung on her arm.

"Tut, tut, girl!" for to the old mariner the haggard woman with snow-white tresses, his only child, was still a girl. "Methinks 'tis that bee in thy bonnet which is in the young master's yonder: many love and are loyal to the sea whom it hath widowed and orphaned. Look at Mother Perkins down there in Saltern village; her father, grandfather and husband were drowned, but she sent her lads to sea with a blessing, and now there is but one left, and the lust for the sea is on 'im, and she'll let him go too, I'll wager, and if he never comes back, she will say as a true seaman's wife and mother should, 'The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, Blessed be the name of the Lord,' and she would no more think of

The old Green Cloak

cursing the sea than of cursing the Lord. Aye, and there are hundreds like her."

"So there may be, poor things. But there are folks too who cannot forgive the sea—cannot."

Her great eyes flashed wrathfully as she spoke at the wide blue enemy, flecked everywhere with the white sails of fishing-boats and deep purple shadows.

"And whither art thou going with that cargo?" Dan asked his daughter, pointing at the cloak that weighed heavily on her skinny arm.

"Once more I will offer it to him it concerns," Moll answered; and pushing past him, she unlatched the gate, and began slowly to climb the steep path through the furze-bushes that led to the top of the cliff where young Gervase Vidal sat with sad dreamy eyes wandering from the pages of the *The Shepherd's Calendar* ever and anon to the little cove far below where the foam-fringed ripples broke green and clear on the white pebbles.

"Alack," said Dan, "her poor daft brain hath woven into that rusty beggar's cloak some queer fantasy. It lay drying there on the bushes for a week or more, and Moll never noticed it. But one day she took into her head to brush and darn it, and ever since she hath been worriting that 'tis young Vidal's property; but he will not own it, and no wonder. When he refused the di'mond that was inside it,

The old Green Cloak

what should he want with the old shabby mountebank covering ? ”

“ If any one should have it except you, ’twould be my father,” Kit said, “ but he left it here for you, Dan, as a keepsake of the wondrous rescue. Why dost thou let Moll take it away ? ”

“ Because she is not right, poor lass. I humour her crazy whimsies, though, God knows, they are a mighty trial to an old man sometimes. But now, young sirs, if you’ll please to step within, I’ll show ye what’ll make your mouths water and your eyes glisten—the nugget that fell to my share, that time we took the gold, under Drake, in Mexico.”

They had seen it often before, but to-day, when the very air seemed astir with the last and greatest exploit of Captain Drake, they were nothing loth to look at it again. So they followed Dan as he hobbled into the fishy, tarry kitchen, and watched him take a bunch of keys and fumble for the one which unlocked the oak cupboard in the wall where he kept his treasure. They listened to the story which by this time they knew by heart, of the wresting of gold, silver bars, rubies and emeralds from the Spaniards, Dan relating it as if he told it to them for the very first time ; and then each in turn was allowed to finger the nugget.

“ If thou had’st this struck into angels thou wouldst

The old Green Cloak

be rich, Dan, and live in a big fair house, eh ?" asked Hal.

"Aye, mayhap. But Dan Scadding will liever die as he hath lived, a humble seaman, who went to sea to do his duty and serve his Queen ; not to get rich. Mark me, young sirs, greed of riches hath worked the ruin of many a British sailor ere now. Don't go to sea for that. The gold fever distempers the soul as surely as other fevers the body."

"Yet Captain Drake, they say, doth eat from platters and drink from vessels of pure gold, and washes in a golden ewer."

"Not till he had added wealth to her Majesty's purse and widened her dominion, and paid every man, high or low, who helped him to do it every groat that was his due. When they starved, he starved with them, endured their hardships shoulder-to-shoulder, buoyed up their sinking spirits by his own high courage. None would grudge him who thus proved himself a prince among his fellows the princely trappings he hath deserved and earned."

This eloquent speech choked Dan, and he sank coughing on to the end of his bed in the alcove.

"'Tis not for gold that I would go to sea," said Kit, "but to adventure myself . . . and belike," he added, casting down his lids slyly, "to do some fine deed."

"And I would make the North-West Passage, and

The old Green Cloak

sail 'twixt the glittering icebergs, as thou did'st, Dan, when you tried to find Sir Hugh Willoughby and his brave crew. I would fain sleigh a thousand miles over the snow, hunt the Polar bears, eat roast reindeer, and see the sky on fire with the Northern lights."

"And I would rather land on some new coast in the tropics, and wander on and on till I was a-weary under giant palms; then lie down in an orange-grove, and pluck the fruit and watch the fire-flies. And I would like to meet Red Indians and be the first white man they ever saw; and I would make a canoe such as theirs, and fish in one of those monstrous rivers that is wider across than our Otter and Axe and Exe and all the rivers of Devon put together, with the Thames thrown in."

Frank drew a deep breath, flushed and excited at having been allowed to get so far without an interruption from his brothers.

"And the butterflies," he cried, "as big as our birds . . . and their birds! Aye, what a sight to see them wheeling about as thick as gnats, with their shining parti-coloured wings and breasts, scarlet, violet, orange and green."

"But with no sweet song in their throats; so give me our larks and thrushes before them," said Kit, "for all their gaudy feathers."

The old Green Cloak

Suddenly the boys' eager tongues were silenced, and even Dan's cough became less aggressively noisy. A shadow fell across the doorway, and against the background of sea and sky and wind-swept grass now bathed in the sun's setting rays, Moll's gaunt figure appeared again. The cloak was still on her arm, and as she glided into the dusky kitchen she seemed to be conversing with it, oblivious of the presence of her father and the young Fanes.

"He only might untie the knot, and get the secret out of thy folds," she muttered, "but he'll have naught to do with thee; he's too haughty-minded to heed the wise words of Moll Scadding, though he'll be cozened fast enow by conjurers and wizards that wear fine raiment. Well-a-day, thy secret then must be buried—buried; and 'tis not Moll's fault."

She sank on her knees before a great chest standing in the corner by the hearth, where she mixed her potions and simmered herb concoctions in a number of strangely-fashioned vials, copper jars and saucepans.

"Whist," murmured old Dan, "I have never seen her go to that chest since she laid her bridal finery in't the evening of the day that was no bridal day for her, poor lass."

Moll lifted the lid of the chest, and let the light that came in shafts through the open door and the

The old Green Cloak

one small lattice lie on yellowing linen and lace and faded myrtle wreath. For a moment she peered at the wedding garments she had never donned with a sort of tender curiosity, then stuffed the old rusty cloak on the top of them and shut the chest with a bang.

The boys feeling guilty—they hardly knew why—that they had witnessed the scene, took a courteous but hurried leave of the old mariner, and raced homewards, without even loitering by the way to watch a net hauled up the shelving beach overflowing with myriads of leaping, silvery-green mackerel.

V

HOW IRIS SAID HER PRAYERS

By the time they had supped off barrelled herrings, cold meats, manchets, and a salad of herbs, and had sliced a gigantic cob-loaf with bumpy crust into nothingness, the vision of Mad Moll's mumbling over the old cloak as she laid it away with her unworn wedding-clothes had ceased to trouble the boys and almost faded from their minds.

They took another picture to bed with them, for after supper Robin, in his night-smock, came pattering barefooted down the oak staircase and began to tug Kit by the hand excitedly in the direction of the nursery.

"Come softly on tip-toe," said he, "and hearken to her at her prayers. She hath gotten them perfect at last in English, and Doll saith she is a proper little Protestant now, and there is no gainsaying it."

The low, long nursery was rosy still with the dying afterglow of sunset, and in the embrasure of the wide bay window which looked out on the gardens and reddening harvest fields to darkling woodlands

How Iris said her Prayers

beyond, Doll was seated on a three-legged stool, and before her knelt the white-robed figure of a little angel with ebony head reverently bent and hands daintily clasped, while the dimpled soles of her feet emerged from the hem of her smock. But they who had been led to listen at the door by Robin came in for no more than a fervently lisped "Amen," to their great disappointment. Robin was for insisting that Iris should say her prayers over again from the beginning, but Doll declared that was a little too much to expect.

The black-headed angel was evidently of that opinion too, for she jumped off her knees and dancing into the middle of the room went through some antics which were far from angelic. Then she raised her voice and sang in shrill quavering accents as if she mimicked the voice of some old man, a wild song in that strange tongue which childlike in one short month she had come near to forgetting completely.

What did it mean, and what had brought it back to her now when, in the four weeks from the day she and Robin had kissed each other by the fountain on the pleasance, she had done nothing outlandish in their games, and had played with him as decorously as any little comrade born and bred in Devon ?

Singing thus her tiny hands swept the strings of an imaginary harp, her head was thrown backwards,

How Iris said her Prayers

her eyes closed. She represented unconsciously, with extraordinary power in so young a creature, the attitude and manner of singing of such minstrels as had been brought to Dan Scadding's mind at sight of the old green cloak. Her amazed and fascinated listeners were made to see, instead of the child herself, the bent form of an aged bard with trailing snow-white beard, rolling sightless eyes and gnarled fingers. And each couplet, as it rose and fell to that quaintly mimicked quavering cadence, stirred their blood and wrung their hearts though they could not understand a word of the Celtic ditty.

"We must put an end to this," Doll Saunders said impatiently. "She is a heathen witch-child, I vow, and hath only repeated the pretty prayer I taught her like a parrot after all."

The interruption jarred on Iris and broke the thread of her song. The next instant she flung herself on the floor in a passion of weeping. This was no ordinary outburst of childish temper. She neither screamed nor kicked as she had done nightly at being parted from Robin at bedtime, but the small frame shook and heaved with dry convulsive sobs as she called over and over again in a piercing crescendo a name that was not the name of any one present.

"If the Esquire were at home, I'd ask him to whip her out of this tantrum, I warrant I would," said Doll.

How Iris said her Prayers

"Whip her? whip Iris?" echoed all the young Esquires indignantly. "Never shall she be whipped. Never."

"And why not forsooth? Are you the worse for the stripes you've gotten, my lads?"

"We are different. We are not a girl."

"Girl, forsooth! One would think to hear them talk, this were the only girl that was ever born. Now if your lady mother, bless her sweet memory, had chanced to bring four wenches into this wicked world instead of four strapping sons, do you think you'd make the same pother over this foreign mite, then?"

"Yes," answered sharp Frank, "if we were maids and she were a boy."

The others held their nurse's supposition of their being of another sex than they were, as too absurd to notice, and Kit caught the weeping child up in his strong arms and carried her to the little white cot which had been set up for her in the alcove near Doll's bed.

As he laid her down and tucked her in, soothing her in his boyish way, the heartrending sobs began to subside. The glorious eyes looked up through a shower of stormy tears, and Kit was rewarded by seeing the corners of the little mouth crinkle in a smile.

"'Tis like the sun shining forth while it's raining," he exclaimed.

How Iris said her Prayers

Hal and Frank turned on Doll.

"See, she is good again without the whipping you craved to give her," they said witheringly.

But stout Doll was not easily withered. She threatened to get every one of them whipped all round if they kept Robin philandering much longer out of bed when he ought to be asleep.

"Come now, Doll, be not a crosspatch, but sing a hush-a-bye beside her, ever so soft and kind, and then we'll go."

"Ever so soft and kind, lack-a-daisy, Master Kit. I scarce know thee since this hen-chick was added to your father's brood. The rearing up that did for you is not good enow for her, 'twould seem. I'll have no more nonsense ; bid her good-night and begone."

Each boy in turn bent his curly head over the cot, but it was only Kit who felt soft arms steal round his neck, and heard himself called by the unknown, mysterious name.

Perhaps in the dreamlike gloaming Iris thought the bearer of that name had really come back to her again from the bottom of the sea, to comfort and guard her as of old.

VI

GERVASE VIDAL GOES ABROAD

MASTER BIRCH rode on a mild day in the following spring between the primrose-starred hedges of the Devonshire lanes, followed by two serving-men in the tawny yellow cloaks of the Vidal livery.

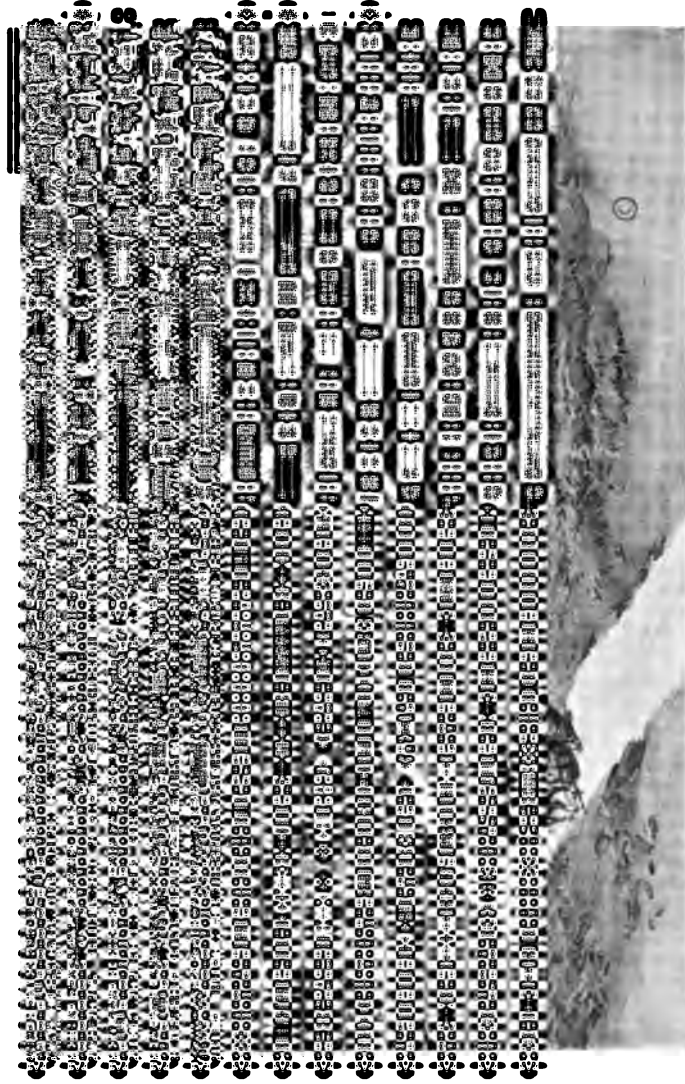
He had been to London, and was returning to the Mount primed with the newest books and the latest gossip of the Court. For if his pupil led the life of a recluse, and was seldom met outside his own domain, the tutor was a familiar enough figure in the country round, and often seen in the streets of Bideford and Exeter. His jaunts to London were rarer but not unfrequent, and when he travelled so far he generally came back in company with one of those suspicious astrologers or necromancers or some master of the arts of fencing and music, who were the only visitors at the Mount since the catastrophe which had befallen the late Sir Gervase Vidal and his fair young wife on that summer afternoon years before. But to-day Master Birch brought no company. The grey towers of the old

Gervase Vidal goes Abroad

place, half feudal, half Tudor, scarcely showed above the green foam of its encircling trees. Though the moat was dry and overgrown with a tangle of flowering shrubs and herbs, the drawbridge across it was still raised at night and used as the main approach to the house from the high-road. The park sloped away to the south, beyond the neglected terraced garden, with its rough-hewn sun-dial on a column. As Master Birch dismounted heavily the almost enchanted stillness was broken by the chapel bell ringing the Angelus with such muffled softness that it could offend no heretic ears without, for the simple reason that it could not reach them.

The great nail-studded door swung back and the tutor stepped out of the April sunshine into the gloom of the vaulted hall, on the stone walls of which hung the rusty helmets and coats of mail of a long line of Vidal knights. Valorously they had fought in the French and Scotch wars and civil broils of their time, and a Humphrey Vidal had been killed on Bosworth Field, leaving a girl-widow to bring up his infant son who in his turn died fighting in some less famous battle abroad.

Brave they had been, but not perfect gentle knights like Chaucer's in private life, and traditions of their riotous living, and of many a fierce and cruel act, yet survived in the surrounding villages. When



VIDAL MOUNT.



THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

Gervase Vidal goes Abroad

they coveted their neighbour's ewe lamb, they had not hesitated to lay hands on it, and the ancient quarrels between Vidals and St. Clares had originated in a Vidal stealing by force the lady-love of a St. Clare when he was away on a crusade. It was still believed by superstitious fisher and country folk that the ghosts of their victims who had languished of old in the gruesome dungeon beneath the now crumbling keep of the Mount, shrieked on stormy winter nights so loud that the unearthly and distressing sound could be heard above the wind and the roar of the waves, and thus legends of Vidal cruelty and Vidal lust had been handed down from generation to generation, lingering in men's mouths even though the later representatives of the name had been upright and courtly gentlemen enough, clinging to the Church of their fathers with unostentatious though unswerving steadfastness through the great religious convulsions of the time.

The tutor's spurs echoed on the stone floor as he passed through the empty hall to the library, where hung a portrait group by Zuccherò of the late master of the Mount in the prime of his goodly manhood, with his sunny, youthful lady smiling beside him, holding their boy by the hand. Master Birch glanced at the dais in the oriel. His pupil was not there, though his papers, books and guitar lay

Gervase Vidal goes Abroad

scattered about as if he had recently left his favourite corner and intended to come back to it.

"He'll be at the crucible again ; it attracts him as the candle the moth." So saying, Master Birch drew aside an arras and climbed a stairway, not without grunts and groans, which announced his coming to the occupant of the circular chamber above. Through the lancet windows one saw the bright spring world without, the young bracken unfurling its tender green on the expanse of dark brown heather that stretched away to the highest point of the red cliffs between the silver Axe and the mouth of Exe. Beyond, the gulls flashing their white wings over a still grey sea dotted with fishing-boats, and here and there passed a stately vessel with full-spread sails.

The boy in his teens sat with his back to the light, too absorbed to heed that the sun was shining and the air full of awakening life and the promise of spring. He was almost hidden from sight by the clouds of smoke that rose with nauseous fumes from the chemicals he was watching in the crucible. A huge, long-furred cat was perched on his shoulder, blinking its yellow eyes in perfect contentment, apparently innocent of any design on a pair of tame Barbary mice, striped like zebras, frisking about the uneven floor.

"Greeting, Master Birch," said the boy, looking up

Gervase Vidal goes Abroad

through the smoke. "I am glad to see you back. And hast thou visited the great Dr. Dee, at his house in Mortlake, and gotten for me a crystal like unto the marvellous one he doth possess?"

"Nay, thy guardian took up too much of my time."

"Then thou didst not go to Dr. Dee's?" The tone was deeply disappointed. "What had my guardian to say?"

"Much with regard to your future."

"Future! Thou shouldst have told him I have none according to his notions."

"But he doth insist on't that you shall have a future. He gives you choice of three paths. Either you shall go to Christ Church Oxon; or enter yourself at the Courts of Law, at Gray's Inn; or make the grand tour and visit, if thou will'st, the universities of Padua and Leyden."

"Must I obey?"

"Twere well to do so. Thou art not of an age to know what is best for thyself, and habits of solitude should not be acquired in youth, as they may never be cured."

The boy gazed thoughtfully into the depths of the crucible.

"If I must obey," said he, "I'd fain choose the last course you mention, save for the crossing of the sea."

Gervase Vidal goes Abroad

"Let not that be a stumbling-block, lest 'tis said thou art afraid."

"Afraid!" cried Gervase, pushing back his chair and raising eyes full of anger. "Who would dare say it? Have I not fought and conquered my fear by swimming daily in the sea? Have I not battled and buffeted with the waves on fair and foul mornings? Is that being afraid?"

"'Tis hate, I know well, not fear, thou hast for the mighty ocean, but other folks draw their own conclusions."

"Well, they may for all I care," Gervase said, regaining his air of nonchalance. "Eh, Belphebe?" he went on, stroking the cat, who purred and rubbed her jaw against his neck. "If we can project gold here in this small space, methinks 'twere a greater achievement than getting it from the Spaniard."

He bent again over the crucible, and extinguished the sulphurous flames. There was no gold in the ashes, and he rose.

"Now then, Master Birch, what books hast thou brought, and what news?"

"The books are below in the library, and the news will keep till you have had a breath of this jocund spring air, of which you stand in need, judging by your pale and wan looks."

Gervase Vidal goes Abroad

They descended the stair, and the boy eagerly scanned the parcel of books.

"I will go forth with these," said he, tucking under his arm Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*, and a manuscript copy of the *Arcadia* in French, for Master Florian's translation had not yet appeared. After pacing awhile a moss-grown walk, tutor and pupil sank on to a stone bench with rounded back on the southern side of the house, where the gold-crested wrens, sparrows and robins came hopping tamely about their feet. Gervase possessed a strange attraction for animals, and it seemed as if they divined his aversion to slaying them in sport. Though he never made use of hawks and hounds in the ordinary way, he kept both, and had turned his father's falconry into a kind of hospital for birds and beasts. Here he had tended wounded gulls and herons, tamed a refugee fox, and harboured stray dogs, and other forlorn and curious pets. Such a thing had been actually known as a superannuated hound from elsewhere, knowing its hour was come and it was to be shot, finding its way to the Mount and being entertained there till it died a natural death.

"That elegant romance," said Master Birch, as the leaves of the *Arcadia* fluttered in the spring breeze, "in which poetical shepherds woo fair shepherdesses, was writ by Philip Sidney when he retired to

Gervase Vidal goes Abroad

Wilton after his falling out with the Queen. That matchless gentleman and courtier had the boldness to express himself extremely contrary to her Majesty's proposed marriage with the Duke of Anjou, saying it would gall and alienate the hearts of her people if she mated with 'a Monsieur and a Papist.' And methinks 'twas a wise opposition, for albeit of our religion, the French imp is young enough to be her son and so ill-favoured withal that he must ever have been an eyesore to one who is so fine a connoisseur of masculine beauty as is her Majesty. 'Twas but a brief coolness. Philip finished his *Arcadia*, and doth adorn the Court again. But 'tis Walter Raleigh, since he came out of Ireland, who hath now with a bound climbed highest in the Queen's favour, and is nigh to occupy the place my Lord of Leicester so long hath held in her loving regard. Master Raleigh of Hayes was a gentleman of somewhat decayed fortunes, and this son while at Oxford in straits for want of money, so much so that he did borrow a gown of one I know which he neither restored nor paid for. Yet now his person is ablaze with jewels down to his very shoes, which are valued at 6000 pieces, and he could afford to cast a cloak of costly taffetas and plush on the mire to save the Queen from wetting her feet. Nay, but 'twas that very act, I heard said in your guardian's London house, proved

Gervase Vidal goes Abroad

the turning-point in his fortunes. Since then the Queen can scarce take her eyes off him or smile enough at his wit."

So the tutor babbled on, as was his wont, and the pupil listened, liking well to hear his tales, though he felt no ambition stir within him to emulate a Sidney or a Raleigh any more than a Drake or a Hawkins.

When Master Birch's voice at last ceased to drone, for he was one who retailed the lightest gossip as if it were a discourse or a sermon, there was a long pause, filled by the liquid notes of a thrush on a neighbouring bough. Then Gervase said with a sigh—

"If I had but the crystal like Dr. Dee's, I might find out many things."

"Thou may'st not have the power. The doctor himself makes use of a seer to read his crystal."

"But I think I have the power, and if not I would get Mad Moll to be my seer, for she hath certainly second sight."

"A woman, and one that hath the evil eye, too, belike, whom it were dangerous to employ; but what mystery wouldst thou unravel?"

"First and foremost I would fain see exactly how it happened," he said earnestly. "Many times in my dreams I have pictured them looking up of a sudden and beholding to their great terror the blue sky overcast, and the silver mirror of the sea which lured them

Gervase Vidal goes Abroad

to their death with its coy and gentle ripples, lashing itself into black and cruel fury, and swallowing the fragile barque after playing with it as a cat plays with a mouse. . . . So far I have seen—but afterwards? Was she the first to sink?—perchance he let her slip through his arms. . . .”

“My child,” Master Birch interrupted, his jovial pox-marked face lengthening with deep concern, “why dost thou let thy thoughts dwell everlastingly on that dire and tragical mishap? Hast forgotten our good Father Bell’s exhortation to accept it with meekness and resignation as a chastisement from God and the Holy Mother? We must not inquire into God’s ways. Let it be enough to know that He chose to take them on that fateful afternoon. ’Tis not natural to mope thy youth away in ever mourning for them.”

“Hush, Master Birch, hush,” cried Gervase, “even from you I cannot bear this.”

Again the human voices were silent and the thrush filled the garden with its melodious notes. When Gervase spoke next it was in a different tone.

“’Tis strange,” said he, “but I have a feeling whene’er you mention the name Raleigh which I cannot account for. Methinks ’tis that somewhere in the web of his great career there may be a tiny thread woven that is also entangled in the woof of my life.”

Gervase Vidal goes Abroad

"An extraordinary fancy truly," remarked the tutor, "as thou hast never seen Walter, and for aught I know your father had no intercourse with the family at Hayes."

"But I may see him yet," said the boy.

"Certainly you may, and many other men of note, and fair young ladies too, if you rouse yourself to come forth from your retired shell in obedience to your guardian's wishes."

Much to the surprise of Master Birch, the boy, instead of scouting, as was his custom, those wishes of his guardian made known to him periodically through his tutor, looked up eagerly and said—

"Till I am of age it shall not be said with truth that I shun the faces of my fellows any more than that I fear the sea. I love this home, and my heart clings to the soil it stands on. To me there can be no fairer spot on earth, and 'tis as likely to hide for me the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone as any other part of the world. Yet for all that, till I am of an age to do as I list without interference I will go away."

He picked up a pebble from the path, and descending a pair of broken lichen-covered steps, went and stood by the fish-pond.

"Look, Master Birch," he called over his shoulder, "if it leaps once 'tis Oxford, if twice the law and Gray's Inn, if thrice or more the grand tour."

Gervase Vidal goes Abroad

The stone made three dents on the face of the water as it skimmed across the pond.

"Then 'tis the grand tour," exclaimed Master Birch, not ill-pleased at his pupil's decision. And he it was who bore the young master of the Mount company when he rode away one day in June to take ship for France. It could not be said that he was missed in the neighbourhood of his home where he was so little known, but nevertheless speculations were rife for some time afterwards as to what motive had taken Gervase Vidal away and as to when he would come back.

BOOK II

VII

HOW THE FANES WENT TO SEA

THE snows of seven winters had melted, and for the seventh time the midsummer fires were about to flare on the Devonshire hill-tops, since the ever memorable midsummer morning when the sea had brought the Fanes a sister.

According to a reckoning which perforce could not be accurate, Iris was now somewhere between twelve and thirteen, and had grown into a maid straight and supple as a young sapling, fresh, strong and strangely fair, with a rare wild beauty of her own. Her bringing up so far, despite grumbles and misgivings on the part of Doll Saunders, had been much the same as Robin's. With him she had learned to ride, and when he had first ridden out with the goshawk on his wrist she had the gerfalcon on hers. Her heart, like his, throbbed with ecstasy at the sound of the drums beating up the partridges in the marshland on a misty autumn morning. Together

How the Fanes went to Sea

they had repeated their catechism to the Vicar in Budleigh church porch, and on Sundays and holy days listened to his sermons, seated on benches carved with the St. Clare and Raleigh arms, in the old Norman chancel.

Iris loved the giant Christopher Fane as her father, and the younger curly-headed giants as her very brothers. She loved too the peaceful, idyllic surroundings of her adopted home—the gardens, woods and smiling orchards, the rich pastures dotted with sleek red-brown cattle, the ferny glens and lanes with their steep, flower-bedizened banks; the windy slopes of heather edging the crimson cliffs, in the shadow of which the pale blue sea deepened into shades of darkest green and purple. Sweet scenes they were, hallowed for her in after life by memories of her childish pleasures, her girlhood's little triumphs, and of the kindnesses of those who had saved her from the waves and cared for her with so fond a devotion. Yet deep in the recesses of the child's heart was another home,—without knowing it she carried about with her always a blurred picture of great yawning peat-bogs, of frowning hills and beetling crags, of a grey solitary castle through which the gusts of heaven swept, rising against the cloudy sky above a little lake that lay like a sapphire amidst the black, bleak wastes all round, where the

How the Fanes went to Sea

banshee moaned and combed her long hair at sunset.

Sometimes the picture had, for a lightning-flash, risen vividly before her, and this had happened once when the October gales rent the mild Devon air, and set the wind roaring in the chimneys and the billows thundering on the pebbles of Saltern beach, so that they could be heard in the hall of the Manor, where Christopher sat in his high-backed chair by the carved chimney-piece, after a long day in the open, and read aloud Las Casas' *Cruelties of Spain* to his boys. Then Iris heard other voices than those which had become dear and familiar to her, and saw other faces, and stood in their midst with far-away strained eyes, asking, "Where is it? Where are they? Who am I?"

"Thou art ours, dearest chuck, Iris Fane of Budleigh," Christopher said, taking her to his breast. And then he repeated the assurance, which he thought probable enough, that those to whom she had belonged by blood had perished with the Irish barque on that fatal midsummer night. Since then men of Devon had gone by shoals to seek their fortune by settling in the "savage" sister country, so sorely devastated and depopulated by the suppression of the Desmond revolts, where Raleigh dreamed amongst other vast dreams of a fair and prosperous colony rising like a

How the Fanes went to Sea

phoenix from the soil, which during his service in Ireland he had watched being soaked with blood and strewn with ashes and ruins.

The Devonshire-born knight, who had climbed from poverty to heights of wealth, fame and power at the court of Elizabeth, and basked in the sunshine of his royal mistress's smiles (through, the world said, that one unpremeditated master-stroke of gallant impulse of casting his gorgeous cloak in the mud for the Queen to step on), was beset by restless ambitions.

Whilst his privateers scoured the seas, and his servants planted Virginia, his eyes turned often to his property nearer home in the country of sighs and tears, and pictured its desolation transformed into acres of waving corn and rye, with hundreds of homesteads and farms like those of his native county.

He told the young Devonians that there were pearls and even diamonds to be found in Ireland, which vied with those of the Indies ; and so the sons of yeomen, farmers and squires, between the Axe and the Exe and Dart and Tavy, had been betaking themselves to Ireland frequently, and certain it was that many must have published there the story of the miraculous deliverance of the castaway Irish child who had found shelter in Budleigh Manor, and was being nurtured beneath its roof as the daughter of its master.

How the Fanes went to Sea

But the kinsfolk of Iris, if any existed, made no sign. She remained unclaimed, and as the years went by the tale of how she had come to the Manor, which at the time had been the nine days' wonder of the countryside, was almost forgotten. The neighbours had long ceased to regard her as a curiosity and an alien, and few remembered that she was not born as well as bred a Devonshire lass, with the blood of the Fanes of Exmoor running in her veins. She herself seemed to have forgotten it too, for to outsiders she was a maid merry and careless enough, and if they marvelled much at her feats of horsemanship and other boy-like accomplishments, they knew nothing of the occasional lapses into profound melancholy when far-off, forgotten music sounded sadly in her ears, and she saw glimpses of scenes and faces which long ago had become unfamiliar.

These years in the "spacious times of great Elizabeth" had been full of events. Wonderful things had happened ; high enterprises abroad and over seas which, whether they succeeded or failed, stirred the blood to hear of. The Queen's long d'Alençon flirtation had dragged to its end, and her French suitor had sailed away from Greenwich for ever. She had lost the mirror of chivalry, the brightest jewel of her court, Sir Philip Sidney, with the "beautiful soul in the beautiful body," who on the battlefield of Zutphen,

How the Fanes went to Sea

by an act of divine unselfishness, had gained a more undying fame than by all his graces and talents. In the same year a greater ornament of her reign, and one who was not "for an age but for all time," though she knew it not, came up from Stratford to London; a stripling, with the charming medley of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in his pocket and immortal tragedies and comedies in his head. In Ireland, Master Secretary Spenser had been writing his *Faëry Queen*, encouraged thereto by his friend, Walter Raleigh, the "Shepherd of the Ocean" as he quaintly dubbed him; and the genius of Christopher Marlow, to be cut off in a tavern brawl a few years later, had borne fair fruit.

One February day of this year joy-bells had rung from the steeples to proclaim that the head of the fair Scottish queen, so long a captive and the bugbear of Elizabeth, had fallen from the scaffold.

And now the world was full of rumours of the coming vengeance of Spain, of the towering galleons she was building, to be commanded by the bluest-blooded flower of her aristocracy, destined for a death-grapple with the Protestant power; when old scores were to be settled once for all against British seamen who had so insolently plundered Spanish gold-ships and sacked Spanish towns. From John o' Groats to Land's End, in country towns and in remotest villages, people talked of the coming of the Spaniard, and

How the Fanes went to Sea

swore that if he came they would be prepared to meet him.

Along the coast there were sailors, old and young, whose limbs had endured the tortures of the Inquisition, and who bore about with them marks of the Holy Office ; and here the hate of Spain was bitterest and wanted nothing to fan it into flame.

By this time both the elder Fanes had got their way, and been to sea and met the Dons face to face more than once in a tussle for treasure on the Spanish Main and in the Azores. But Kit's first voyage had sobered though not quenched his young enthusiasm ; for that expedition to the Northern shores of Newfoundland, under the scholar-seaman Sir Humphry Gilbert, had fulfilled no golden dreams, but had been a series of disastrous failures from the outset, when a storm sent the *Ark* back to Plymouth, and parted the *Swallow* and *Squirrel* from the rest of the little fleet. They had met again, and then had followed long months at anchor in the Bay of Concepcion, ineffectual colonizing, famine, sickness and mutiny, for the scholar and high-souled dreamer Gilbert was no leader of men like Francis Drake, and the half-famished, disappointed sailors flouted his commands. Afterwards there had been seen in the waves, "tacking about, a sea-monster of evil omen, half fish, half lion ;" and the *Delight*

How the Fanes went to Sea

foundered. Sir Humphry had taken command, instead, contrary to entreaties, of the little *Squirrel*, and had been heard, sitting abaft with a book in his hand, to speak the never-to-be-forgotten words, "We are as near to Heaven on sea as on land," ere the frail barque was lost to sight for ever in the stormy seas.

And so Christopher Fane's eldest son had come home the first time, ragged and gaunt, bearing no golden sheaves, with no story of glorious triumph to relate. Yet with the imperishable memory in his young heart of a noble example, and this, when he came home again from other voyages with his share of prize-money and treasure, would have prevented any vain boasting and swagger about his adventures, even if he had not grown into a lad of a silent and modest mien, to whom all such big talk was an impossibility.

In April, Hal had, as he considered to his infinite good fortune, been taken on Sir Francis Drake's *Bonventure*, when that most daring Captain sailed from Plymouth Sound straight into Cadiz harbour, and burned eighty of Philip's ships, which he called singeing his Spanish Majesty's beard ; and then bore on triumphantly to the coast of Portugal, where he saw the Armada preparing, and challenged the veteran admiral, Santa Cruz, to come forth and do

How the Fanes went to Sea

battle with him there and then. This brilliant expedition, which the Queen winked at without authorizing, ended with the waylaying and capture of the *San Philip*, a magnificent caraque from the Indes, richly loaded, to the value of half a million. In the early days of June hundreds of West Country folks in holiday bravery flocked to see the great *San Philip* towed into Dartmouth Harbour. And so Christopher's second son had come home aglow with triumph, only to start again the next week with Kit on one of Raleigh's vessels bound for Virginia.

Now Frank's turn had come; stout little Frank, little no longer, for in these years the young Fanes, even Robin, had shot up in stature with the rapidity of the beanstalk, though they did not resemble it, having developed proportionately in width. Eagerly he shut his Latin and Greek books for good, and with the blessing of Dan Scadding and the old divine of Ottery, who had been the boys' preceptor, prepared for a voyage on the *White Eagle*, a merchant cruiser from Dartmouth to the West Indies.

Frank rose at dawn on Midsummer morning, celebrated as the birthday of Iris in default of a surer date, and went round to say his farewell to hawks and hounds, lingering longest by gallant old Turk, whose dim eyes and hoary nose warned him that he might not be there when he came back.

How the Fanes went to Sea

Then he went in to take his seat at his father's right hand, heading the long bountifully-spread breakfast-table in the panelled hall, round which were gathered neighbours who had come to drink Frank's health in the Esquire's amber home-brewed ale. Whiist the meal was going on there was much bustling to and fro, and a little later all the household drew up under the leafy chestnuts that shaded the paved yard, to wish Master Frank God-speed on the ocean and watch him ride away as they had watched his brethren before him.

VIII

THE DANCING DOG.

FRANK was not to go alone to Dartmouth. Beside him rode his father, and behind, followed by Jim Mace and another serving-man, the inseparable pair, Robin and Iris. The latter was a joy to the eye as she sprang unaided on to her glossy jennet, her boyish limbs free as yet from such fashionable impediments as farthingale and stomacher. The kirtle of her green riding-dress was straight and plain, and her throat encircled by no ruff rose like the stem of a flower from the folds of a knotted kerchief. In dense masses, black as night, her hair fell loose on her shoulders beneath a jaunty cap with orange plumes. In attire, Iris was more like a Maid Marian of the days of Cœur-de-Lion than one of those coifed and furbelowed damsels whom we see kneeling *en queue* in attitudes as starched as their ruffs on the tombs of our ancestors.

There was not a horse in her foster-father's stables that she could not have ridden bare-backed, but now as the party walked their horses towards Budleigh village she sat erect on a saddle with as easy a young

The Dancing Dog

grace as she sat on the gnarled branch of an apple-tree or on the top of the espaliered wall watching the fruit ripen.

Frank glanced back over his shoulders at his home lying in the silvery rays of the early sunlight, the shadows of its tall ivied chimneys making black clefts on the whiteness of the road, then turning a hopeful face forwards again he beheld Doll and Mercy scrambling over the paddock-gate, waving frantic farewells and tossing nosegays at him. As he caught the little bunches of bachelor's-buttons, lad's-love, and other sweet homely flowers, he laughed though the women were weeping, and he asked Mercy banteringly if she had put her shoes beside her bed the night before, "in the shape of a T, to see who her true love would be," according to a custom of country maidens on Midsummer Eve.

"Frank will dance at your bridal, Mercy, when he comes home," Robin called out, "and he'll bring Doll a fine wedding-garment wrought in the Indies."

"Tut, Master Impudence," exclaimed Doll, taking the corners of her apron out of her eyes. "There's an age when sensible wenches cease to dream of husbands and bridals, and Mercy has passed it."

"Indeed, Mrs. Doll, then it must be the year one since you gave up the notion," Mercy retorted, also dropping her apron, and in her indignation at

The Dancing Dog

Doll's affront forgetting to shed tears of sentiment at Master Frank's departure.

"Nay, good souls," said the Esquire in his kindly voice, "I know well 'tis for the sake of continuing faithful in my service that the two of you have refused a score of sweethearts."

At which soothing speech of the master's both the elder and the younger woman beamed, and as he touched his roan with his spurs and the little cavalcade started again on its journey, they resumed their waving and weeping and calls of "Good-luck, Master Frank, good luck ; come back safe and sound !"

They rode on through happy white villages, by shady woodland paths and high-banked lanes wreathed with honeysuckle and dog-roses, pink, white and crimson, and at noon they left the grey towers of Exeter Cathedral behind them and reached the wild rugged edge of Dartmoor. The great gloomy tors towered against the sky to their right, and all the way on their left they never lost sight of the sparkling sea as they passed that galaxy of fair combes leading down to blue bays, which in Torbay reach a climax of fairness and blueness.

It was near evening when they crossed the swiftly-rushing green waters of the Dart and saw before them the Castle and the wooded slopes of Gallant's Bower, and beyond the steep terraced town, with its gabled

The Dancing Dog

houses hanging to the hillside, "like rows of galley-pots in an apothecary's shop," as an ancient chronicler of Devon described them.

The streets were thronged, for the Midsummer revels, with holiday-makers ; gaily-clad shepherdesses danced merrily to the piping of their swains under the rose-garlands which hung from window to window, and the inn-yards were full of mummers, jugglers and mountebanks, bear-leaders and Egyptian folk. Down by the harbour, where some privateers' men had disembarked that morning, the sailors with their once fair ruddy skins tanned by Eastern suns to a foreign darkness, were displaying to their friends silver bars, ivory, coral and silken stuffs which rivalled the kerchiefs of the gypsies in brilliancy of hue. Within "Jawbones," the massive chain drawn across the harbour's mouth, where of old King Richard of the Lion's Heart had assembled a lumbering fleet for the Crusades, rose the mast of the *White Eagle* dressed with flags, flapping gently in the summer breeze. Frank beheld it with a thrill from the jutting bow-window of the inn, and could scarcely take his eyes off it to look at the little Greek Testament which his father gave him with a few words of parting advice.

But Frank was not too excited at the prospect now so near of realizing his heart's desire, to forget that it was his duty to admonish and remind Robin of his

The Dancing Dog

trust, as Kit and Hal on the eve of departure had reminded him.

So when Christopher was speaking aside with Frank's captain and Iris had gone with the chambermaid to shake the dust from her kirtle and wash off travel stains, Frank said to Robin—

"Thou wilt now be the only one left to guard our sister. Remember never to let her wander alone to Vidal's Cove or near the Mount."

"I vow that she never shall," Robin said, "but even if she listed she could not, for I am always with her."

Despite the undoubted fact that the master of the Mount had unhesitatingly declined to take possession of Iris when it was conceded that he might lawfully do so, the Fanes cherished a suspicion that he had repented it by this time, or certainly would repent it if he knew what a beautiful maid Iris had grown into. The prejudice which they had taken over from the St. Clares with the Manor, its lands and rent-roll, had in these years been kept alive and fed by rumour. And rumour had been more rife than ever since Gervase had come back from his long Continental travels and withdrawn again into hermit-like seclusion. One story said that he had spent most of his time abroad at the Seminary of Douay and had secretly taken priest's orders. Another that he had sown a hardy crop of

The Dancing Dog

wild oats at the French court. A third that he had lost his heart to a Venetian lady, who had played with it and proved false, so for this reason he had returned to his old dislike of women and swore to worship the memory of his drowned mother. Indeed, poor Gervase Vidal, through being unlike his fellows in his habits and tastes, had a character attributed to him that was not his own, and to the inhabitants of the Manor had become as much a creature of fable, though only divided from them by so many acres, as some savage potentate of undiscovered climes.

Frank was satisfied with the fervour of his younger brother's promise, and little dreamed that the imaginary enemy, from whom it was necessary to guard Iris, instead of being far away secure in his fastness on the cliff above Saltern, was at that very moment sitting talking with Master Birch in a private parlour of the same inn at Dartmouth.

Christopher and his party supped with other guests in the common room, at the expense of Frank's captain, who was a jovial and sumptuous entertainer, and as a jole of salmon caught in the Dart, and a Lombard pie were despatched, and the *aqua vite* went round, conversation became animated. One name seemed in every one's mouth, the name of the Queen's great favourite, of him who was soldier, poet, Member of Parliament, colonizer and sea-

The Dancing Dog

captain by deputy, and now Knight, Lord Warden of the Stannaries and Captain of the Guard, a Devonshire name and one to conjure with in the West Country, the name of Sir Walter Raleigh. They talked of the potatoes he had planted in his garden at Youghal, and of the tobacco he smoked from a big silver-bowled pipe, having set the fashion at court, Gloriana herself enjoying the fumes, for the humble plant and the fragrant weed, in these days so universal in their uses, were then regarded as amongst startling novelties from the New World.

"I saw him smoking his pipe yester eve, on a seat by the riverside, below Greenway yonder, where he now tarries," said a gentlemen adventurer who had been on more than one occasion Raleigh's deputy at sea, and had laid wait on his behalf for many a rich cargo on its way to Spain. "We soon accustom ourselves to a fashion. 'Tis not so long ago that Sir Walter's servant, seeing smoke issue from his pipe, thought he was afire, and would have deluged him with buckets of water."

"And what errand hath brought the darling of our English Cleopatra back to Devon just now?" some one asked.

"To-morrow early he holds his office as Warden of the Stannaries at Crockern Tor on Dartmoor, when the tanners flock to the judgment-seat from all parts

The Dancing Dog

to hear their new laws read and to have their grievances redressed."

"Then by my troth," Christopher Fane exclaimed, "we will make Crockern Tor come on our way homewards in the morning and witness the ceremony."

"Prithee, father, do," said Frank, eagerly. Then he blushed. For a moment he had actually forgotten that by the morning the *White Eagle* would have unfurled her topsail, fired her guns, and set forth with himself and most of the company present on board her towards the Atlantic.

"So, young man," laughed the captain, "at the eleventh hour you have a mind to go home again instead of coming to sea as my shipmate, eh?"

"No, sir," answered Frank. "'Twas only I would fain my father went home by Crockern Tor, that my brother Robin and my sister Iris should see the great Raleigh."

"Here's to the health of thy sister Iris," the captain cried, raising his tankard and bowing to the only wearer of a petticoat who graced the board.

And Iris, used to the position, returned thanks with pretty courtesy to the captain for drinking her health. Then at the sound of a cithern without, she sprang to her feet.

"Hearken! There are belike mummers in the yard.

The Dancing Dog

Will the company excuse me if I go into the gallery with Robin to watch them, father?"

"Aye, thou art always crazed to see mummers," and as the boy and girl darted through a window on to the carved wooden gallery which ran round the courtyard of the inn, Christopher added to his neighbour, the gentleman-adventurer, "'tis a pity my foster-daughter is not a boy; methinks she could earn a living as an actor, for she is a born mimic. She oftentimes sets us a-laughing and a-weeping too with her acting. She can rant like a tragedy Queen, swagger like a coxcomb gallant, and feign to the life an old beggar-man or woman, with cracked quavering voice and tottering footsteps. When she hath seen a play acted at a fair, 'tis her delight to act it over again at home, filling all the parts herself."

"Then I'll warrant whatever play 'tis the mummers are acting out there, 'twill gain in repetition by your daughter," was the answer. "Yet, and even in one of her sex, such a talent need not be hid altogether under a bushel. The Queen's majesty will have her maids act in masques."

"I was only in jest, sir. I should not desire really to see my daughter make a public spectacle of herself."

"You would be highly honoured nevertheless to

The Dancing Dog

see her take part in the spectacle of a royal masque," the other persisted.

"There are no players," announced Robin, stepping back into the room, "but only some vagabonds with an old ape in a coloured jacket, and a mongrel dog that they say doth dance to the measure of music, but meseemeth he goes through his tricks in an ill fashion, and wouldn't do one at all without the whip."

"Robin, come, he hath turned a somersault," called Iris from the gallery, "and now dies for his country."

"And that is easier to him than aught else, so little life hath the master's beatings left in the mongrel," mocked one of the spectators.

"'Tis a sorry performance," said another.

And indeed the "dancer" of nondescript breed, whose only beauty was a pair of brown eyes shining wistfully from behind a veil of shaggy hair, seemed scarcely able to get through his task even with the help of the lash and his master's oaths, so feeble and emaciated was his canine frame from heat and hunger.

In an age when polished courtiers and refined women parleyed euphuisms in cock-pits and at bear-baitings, when the Virgin Queen herself delighted in barbarous sports, and could watch the death-agony of a stag without turning a hair, it was not likely that

The Dancing Dog

a dancing dog, struggling in the courtyard of an inn to do his small part and failing through starvation, would excite compassion on the part of the onlookers, or any sentiment but scorn and derision.

There was present, however, one who was before his time in love for mute creation and pity for its silent sufferings.

When the poor little dancer, in its ludicrous tinsel skirt, after obediently feigning death, could hardly be goaded into standing again on its hind-legs in a martial attitude, when its weak fore-paw dropped the pop-gun with which it was commanded to shoot at imaginary Spaniards, a figure clad in black, with stooping gait, emerged from the shadow of the gallery, and arrested the half-drunken showman's whip in a furious chastisement of the exhausted animal.

"How canst expect thy slave to do his work on an empty stomach?" asked Gervase, for he it was.

"How can I fill mine if the brute is froward and lazy, sirrah?" the man retorted.

"Fill thy purse with this, and give me the dog. 'Tis more than his poor antics could earn you in a year."

The man gaped in astonishment at the gold pieces in his palm, and before he could say anything in opposition to the bargain the fainting dog concluded it

The Dancing Dog

himself by a beseeching glance at his deliverer and a wag of his stumpy tail. Gervase lifted him in his arms and strode back to his companion with his curiously-acquired possession, while the groups of roysterers standing about in the yard made their comments.

"Meseemeth Mad Vidal doth covet a currish brute before a well-bred one."

"Aye, and when his cats kitten he won't have their progeny drowned."

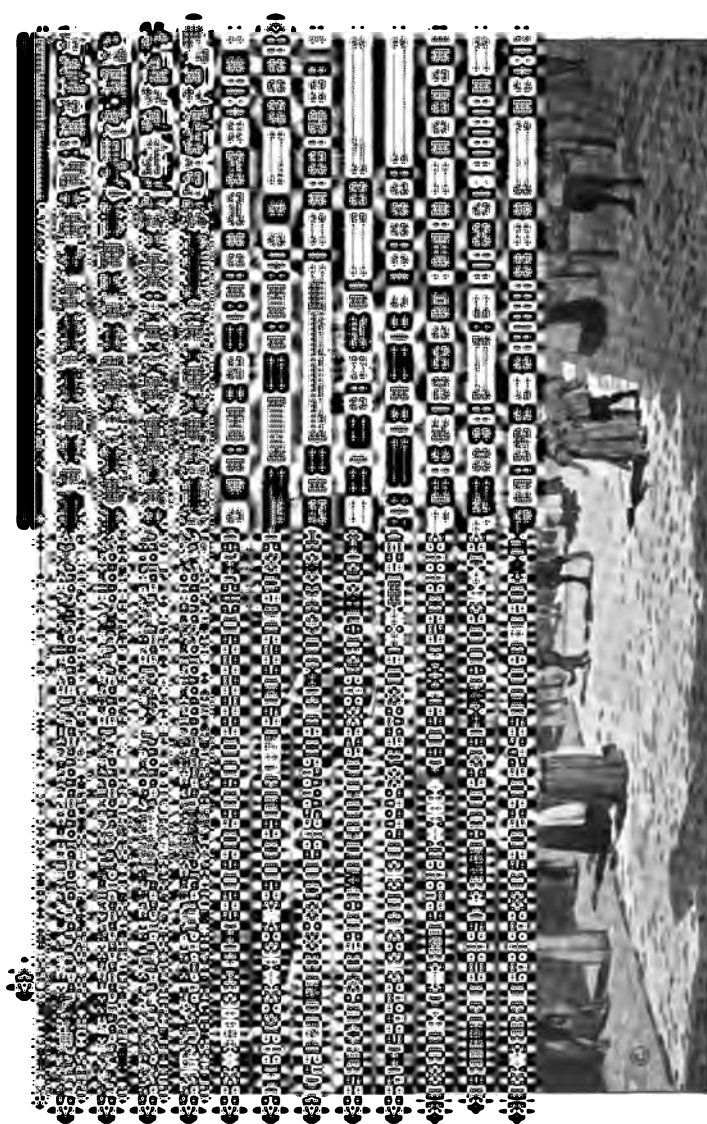
"Hath he come forth to Dartmouth with the sole purpose of purchasing a dancing cur?"

"The ways of Vidal and his mentor are dark and mysterious, but to-day methinks they have come hither to attend the parliament to-morrow at Crockern Tor."

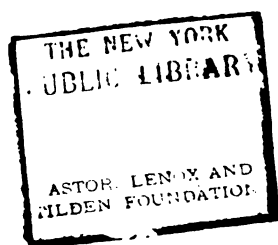
As the words passed from mouth to mouth, Iris, leaning on the gallery above with her chin in her hands, caught the name of Vidal.

"Then this is he," she said to her foster-brother, "against whom I have heard you rail as if he were a wicked monster? This gentleman, whose heart is so kind that it containeth room to pity a poor illused brute?"

"Belike the reason he befriended it is because it refused to shoot a Spaniard," answered Robin, ready in his boyish prejudice to hit on an unfavourable explanation of Vidal's charity.



IN THE INNYARD.



The Dancing Dog

"Thou dost not know whether 'tis true that he would be on the side of Spain against his Queen and country. And even should it be true, I like him so well for what I have seen him do to-day that I would fain speak with him and tell him so."

"Speak with him!" cried Robin, aghast. "Thou wouldst not surely wish to speak with this Vidal?"

"I would; and why not? Is he not our neighbour, and are we not commanded to love our neighbours as ourselves?"

"Not when they have deserved to be hated, as these Vidals have for hundreds of years."

"But this one, how can he help what his great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather did before he was born?"

"He hath done enough himself. He neglects his land and his tenants for star-gazing and conjuring. He would not let his timber be used for shipbuilding, he so misliketh the sea. 'Tis said, too, he would welcome the Spanish, because he is a Papist."

"Nay, is there nothing newer to be brought against him? I have heard this old story so often," Iris retorted, straining her eyes into the shadows beneath the gallery whence the subject of conversation had disappeared with his dog.

Robin, in despair, looked round for Frank to come to the rescue with a superior argument to convince

The Dancing Dog

Iris of the master of the Mount's iniquities, but the party within had broken up, the captain had gone to his ship, and Christopher and his boy were preparing to follow.

When the moon rose in the cloudless summer sky, still tinged with the rose and hyacinth glow of the departed sun, the Esquire, with Iris and Robin beside him, stood and watched the stately vessel, sped by the boom of guns and shouts, spread her sails and glide through Jawbones out of the harbour, bearing the third Fane on the quest of those adventures by sea and land for which his soul had thirsted, as had the souls of his two elders, since early boyhood.

"Wouldst thou not fain go too?" Iris asked number four, as they turned back towards the inn.

"My turn will come," said the boy. "Till then I would liefer stay with you. One of us must needs stay at home to guard our sister."

"Guard, forsooth! What from?" Iris asked laughing. "Art thou afraid I shall tumble off my horse or into the sea unless you are ever at my side? I should miss you, Robin, if you had gone to sea with Frank, but for all that I can take care of myself methinks, both on horseback and on foot."

"There are dangers thou wotst not of," the boy replied, and the bogey which he and his brothers had

The Dancing Dog

constructed out of their unknown neighbour rose before his mental vision.

In his private chamber, at the inn, whilst all Dartmouth's citizens and midsummer guests had flocked at turn of tide to the harbour's brink to see the outgoing ships, the bogey bent over his spent canine patient, tending and feeding him with as much, perhaps more, tenderness than he would have done had the sufferer been human.

IX

THE WARDEN OF THE STANNARIES

WHERE the moor began to purple beyond the stunted, grotesquely-twisted trees of Wistman's Wood, the massive pile of Crockern Tor reared itself suddenly against the sky. In this solitary silence, which generally even the curlews seemed shy of breaking with their plaintive refrain, the hardy stannators of the moorlands had gathered from Saxon times at the summons of their Lord Warden to hold their conventions.

Roughly hewn in the grey rock of the Tor were the Warden's chair, the seats for the jurors, the cornerstone of the court crier, and a table on which were parchments and a bottle of wine from the cavern cellar. To-day, burgesses from Tavistock and Ashburton and other towns, crowds of rough and unkempt tinners had mustered in great force to attend this open-air parliament, for in the granite chair beneath the cloudless blue vault of heaven sat the versatile knight, the accomplished courtier and well-beloved of his Queen, Walter Raleigh. His personality had an

The Warden of the Stannaries

attraction for the West-Country folk who were proud to claim him as their own,, and with whom he was as popular as he was the reverse among his fellow courtiers at Whitehall.

With an almost solemn dignity he filled his *role* of Lord Warden of the Stannaries, the usual dazzling splendour of his apparel hidden beneath the sombre folds of his robe of office resembling the garb of the ancient Druids.

For the time being his whole soul was absorbed in administering the business of the new law, drawn up by himself for the tinnerns, settling their suits and redressing their grievances. As, sceptre in hand, he read aloud from the parchment scroll before him in the rather thin but incisive voice with the strong Devonshire accent which it never lost, a rumbling murmur of approval and admiration came forth from the concourse of people assembled round the Court.

At the moment when Esquire Fane with Robin and Iris rode up to the edge of the throng, Mr. Vidal, of Vidal's Mount in the circuit of Budleigh in the county of Devon, had been called by the crier, and came to the bar to render account of certain tin mines on his estates which lay unworked.

"Yonder family, Master Vidal," said the Warden, indicating a rugged, wild-looking couple with a string of half-naked children, "bring the charge against you

The Warden of the Stannaries

that they are in a pitiable starving plight whilst a source of wealth lies idle at the door of their hut."

"Any one is at liberty to dig for tin on my lands for the asking, your honour," the squire of the Mount answered. "'Tis only I crave to be excused the being concerned therein. Tin is a metal which hath little interest for me."

"You aspire, belike, as do many in these times, to the finding of gold?" Raleigh asked, raising the keen grey eyes, set deep and somewhat near together beneath his high dome-like forehead, from the scroll on the table in front of him and fixing them searchingly on the young man's face.

"To the making of it rather than the finding."

This answer appealed to a taste of the many-sided Lord Warden which he had little time to cultivate—a taste for chemistry and the occult arts.

"I have heard of your laboratory, Master Vidal," he said; "and when we have disposed of the business in hand, I shall ask you to allow me to ride home with you, to watch some experiment, perhaps of transmuting tin into gold."

Gervase bowed.

"I shall be proud if Sir Walter Raleigh will accept the hospitality of the Mount for this night, but I cannot promise——"

"Experiments with so base and negligible a metal

The Warden of the Stannaries

as tin?" the other interposed, with a twinkle. Then dropping the *sotto voce* familiar tone in which he had spoken to Gervase Vidal, he quickly resumed his judicial air, and dismissed the throng of burgesses and miners with a harangue full of rhetoric and humour.

As the people dispersed in all directions, streaming over the purple moor, the Lord Warden's quick glancing eye caught for a moment the vision of another face which awoke within him a reminiscent interest akin to that with which he had regarded the face of Gervase Vidal a few minutes before. The girl on horseback, with her cloud of dark hair crowned with oak leaves, with which her foster-brother had playfully replaced the plumed cap as they had climbed the steep leafy ways from the shores of Dart in the early freshness of the morning, set some chord of memory vibrating which, he knew not why, took Raleigh back to the troublous days of his captaincy in Ireland. He looked again wondering, then concluded that it was the Irish eyes, misty violet fretted with black, so unlike the eyes of Devonshire maidens, that recalled to him here on the summit of Dartmoor the hills of Lismore and the boggy tracts of Munster, and vaguely some scene connected with them.

They rode by, the giant Esquire Fane on his

The Warden of the Stannaries

mettled horse, the fair, curly-headed, blue-eyed boy, and the girl whose almost foreign looks gave her a touch of mystery, so puzzling in these surroundings to the observant Lord Warden of the Stannaries, that he omitted to take any note of her companions.

"What explanation hast thou to give of it, Robin," Iris asked, when after an exhilarating gallop over the heather they walked their horses again, "this great hero of thine and of Frank's, of whom all the world was talking at Dartmouth yester even? Methinks he is as ready to follow the man you abuse to his house as the poor dancing dog."

For answer Robin set his teeth and knitted his fair brows in a frown, then he turned to the Esquire and burst forth—

"Father, why didst thou let this happen? Why wast thou not before Master Vidal in offering the Warden hospitality? Methinks we could have entertained him more worthily at the Manor than he will be entertained at the Mount."

"Tush, lad, wouldst thou have had me with no rhyme or reason force myself on the notice of a stranger? I had only a slight acquaintanceship with Sir Walter Raleigh's parents, and none with himself; besides, you forget that 'twas from his side, not from Master Vidal's, the proposal came that he should visit the Mount."

The Warden of the Stannaries

"And Robin is dying of envy that this man should be so honoured," said Iris. "What dreadful thing dost think will befall thy hero, Robin, in that enchanted place behind its fastness of tall trees?"

"Belike the only cheer laid before him will be outlandish salads," the boy answered. "Jim Mace hath heard it said that he lives on such, with viper's blood and powdered toad's feet, that little honest meat is basted in his kitchen, and the turnspit sits at his ease on a velvet cushion in the withdrawing-room."

"And is that all there is to fear?" asked Iris, with the laughing lips that so belied the habitual melancholy of her wonderful eyes. "What if I should invite myself one day to a dinner of herbs in the ogre's stronghold?"

In consternation Robin looked from Iris to see what effect this alarming speech had on his father; but apparently the Esquire had not heard, for he was gazing serenely on a vista of fields, where the lush flowery grass was falling under the glancing scythes of the mowers.

The moorland was behind them, and they were again amidst the pastures and sweet-smelling lanes of the rich red country. And nearing home, Robin felt a growing uneasiness at the sudden curiosity

The Warden of the Stannaries

Iris had begun to show about the Mount and its owner. He was less confident of his power to fulfil the trust than when he had made his promise to Frank, and half wished that his absent brothers would return to take their share of the responsibility of a sister.

X

SIR WALTER AND THE PICTURE

GERVASE VIDAL was leading the way through his spacious library to the turret-stairway, when his distinguished guest halted before the portrait, by Zuccherò, of the late Sir Gervase and his family.

The brilliant evening sunlight, flooding the landscape of furzy slopes and sea without and gilding every quivering leaf of tree and shrub, caught the picture and touched into life-like radiance the fair face of the lady with sunny hair and *insouciant* blue eyes.

For the third time that day Sir Walter was arrested by a face which stirred within him some memory of his career in Ireland. But now it was no dim suggestion, no vain snatching at an elusive thread. Clearly, as if a flashlight had been cast on the scenes he had wished to recall, they leapt up, and he beheld the lady in the picture, or her double, standing by the roadside beneath a lowering November sky, with a child and an old harper beside her, warning him of an ambush that awaited him and his party of eight

Sir Walter and the Picture

horse and eighty foot on the other side of the hill. The warning had not come too soon ; without it he would inevitably have fallen into the nest of kernes and been cut to pieces by their long knives. As it was, he had been able to rout them, though in the skirmish his horse was shot under him, and he, being entangled in the bridle, had another narrow escape.

And the second scene in which this fair woman's face came before him vividly in the flesh, distraught, white, and tragic, was by the hearth of a dilapidated Castle-hall, when, lying on a palet, she had raised herself and had poured forth a torrent of bitter reproaches in musical English, with none of the unhappy island's brogue in its cadence—"Had I known it was by your orders that he—my husband—was murdered, and his head sent to adorn a stake in Dublin ; had I known then, assuredly I would have let those hidden knives do their work. Though a stranger in this country, and detained a prisoner in it against my will year after year, I am ashamed that I am English when I see the cruelties Englishmen commit here, how lightly they shed the blood of the Irish in the name of their Queen. Aye, I am ashamed. Through you I am a second time a widow and my child fatherless ; and I saved your life."

Even as she had spoken thus incoherently in her wild distress, the shadow of death had been on her,

Sir Walter and the Picture

for she was dying slowly from the effects of a bullet-wound and hardships and grief combined. She wished to die, she said, before the English guns without, which were about to besiege this desolate habitation of a pirate Geraldine, whizzed through the gaping rafters of the roof and reduced it to ruins.

Then she besought the English captain whom she had delivered from treachery to let her girl pass in safety to the coast in the care of the aged minstrel, the only faithful servant left to them, there to take ship for England. This he had promised her, and vowed that the child should be safe as his own daughter. When she died a few days later he ordered her decent burial beside the blue loch which lay like a sapphire set in the dark wastes of peat-bog. Under cover of night half-naked fugitives had crept from their hiding-places and set up a most dismal howling at the grave, and now as he stood looking at the picture which recalled so vividly what had long been forgotten, that weird doleful dirge seemed to echo in his ears.

Incidents bloodier and more tragic than these had crowded the chapter of Raleigh's life that belonged to his captaincy in Ireland, yet little thought had he given them in the years since, during which he had sunned himself in his Royal mistress's favour at court, or sat in his palatial study at Durham House on the

Sir Walter and the Picture

Thames, with charts spread out before him, enthusiastically tracing, by the help of a Harriott or a Richard Hakluyt, those voyages into new worlds for which he fitted out ships for others to sail in and chafed at the gilded chains which bound him in person though not in spirit to the old.

Even when he visited his property on Irish soil and smoked his silver-bowled pipe between the potato plants in his pleasant sea-side garden at Youghal, or conversed with Edmund Spenser on hexameters and poesie in Kilcolman Castle, memories of the country's turbulent, blood-stained past did not arise to vex his soul and dim the grandiloquent dreams of a dazzling future in which Ireland too was included.

Strange that in a Devonshire country house his eye should be thus arrested by a face in a picture which brought back so distinctly scenes in that Desmond campaign, the very period of all others in his life he held it well to forget and to consign to the waters of Lethe.

But how was it that here in the picture the fair lady was mated to no fierce piratical Irish chief, but to an English gentleman? She had not been painted by the artist as his memory painted her, with clothes rent and bloodstained, her blue eyes wide with frenzy, her hair streaming in dishevelled masses on her shoulders. The portrait represented her in stiffest, richest raiment,

Sir Walter and the Picture

with a whisk of lace rising from her white shoulders, a jewelled coif on her dainty smooth head, many rows of pearls round her neck, gems on her fingers and shoes, and a smile beaming from eyes and dimpling lips. Had he not seen the face of the lady in the Irish castle as it sank into the repose of death lose its tense tragic lines and take again the soft round curves of its cloudless youth, as some faces do when the soul departs, the likeness between her and the picture might not have been so arresting, might indeed have escaped him altogether.

So plunged was he in bewildered contemplation of the portrait-piece that he had forgotten his host, and started when Gervase touched his arm and asked earnestly—

“You remember to have seen her, my mother, in the days when your father held Hayes Farm? Is it not so?”

“Nay, I never saw her here that I remember.”

“Where, then?”

“In Ireland.”

“But she was never there,” said Gervase, and the note of eagerness died from his voice. “You have heard doubtless,” he added, “that my parents were drowned at sea.”

“News of that tragical mischance reached me in a packet from home when I was soldiering abroad, methinks in France,” Sir Walter said.

Sir Walter and the Picture

Then he, with a quick questioning glance, asked involuntarily, "Were their bodies ever cast ashore?"

"No; and that they were not hath always seemed to double the poignancy of my grief. The sea not only robbed them of life, but robbed me of their remains."

The profound sadness with which he spoke told of an abiding sorrow which had not lost its edge in the excitement and variety of years of foreign travel.

"Hast never thought of robbers afloat on the sea?" The words were on Raleigh's tongue, but the next moment his decision was that they should not be uttered. Why suggest that the "Red Pirate," the wild, handsome scion of the once all-powerful Desmond race, who took to unlawful courses at sea when the rebel fortunes on land were low, the scarlet silken sails of whose ship had at that time been the terror of travellers in the Irish and St. George's Channels?—why suggest that he had encountered the pleasure-skiff caught in the squall of that summer morning, and had saved its fair occupant, but left the man to his fate? For what sort of comfort could it be to the retired scholar of the Mount to be started now on a new track of conjecture, but to arrive at the same conclusion that his parents had perished, the young mother whose memory he adored, and whom he mourned with so extraordinary a filial constancy, by a death

Sir Walter and the Picture

he might perchance deem worse than drowning? Besides, there was no proof, and the search for proof now after the lapse of so long a time would probably be without result.

Sir Walter, therefore, turned from the picture with the swift resolve that the subject must be changed. He had forgotten the child—the child whom, true to his promise, he had had safeguarded with her aged protector through the God-forsaken land bristling with rebels and English swords, to the coast to take shipping for England.

185534A

XI

MAD MOLL ADDS TO AN OLD PROPHECY

SIR WALTER changed the subject by stroking the fluffy yellow cat, a grand-daughter of the late Belphebe. She was called Melpomene, being the survivor of a litter of nine kittens, christened after the nine Muses. Then he smiled at the dancer on his hind-legs.

"What is it our Monsieur Montaigne saith? 'Plus je connais l'homme plus j'aime le chien,'" he quoted.

And as the keen eyes wandered to the student's table on the dais in the oriel, littered with its folios, duodecimos, and half-written sonnets, and fell on a musical instrument of the size of a lute but flat, with more strings, he asked—

"You play then on the olpharion, Master Vidal? My brother, Sir Carew Raleigh, who is master of the horse to Sir John Thynne of Longleat, doth sing to it most excellently. He hath a more delicate and tuneable voice than mine."

"I was unacquainted with it till I travelled some time in Italy and tarried at Cremona, where they

Mad Moll adds to an old Prophecy

fashion all such instruments in rare perfection. I took lessons, and since have preferred it to the guitar."

"In truth I have a mind to envy you, Master Vidal, all your leisure for cultivating the Muses to the top of your bent in this solitude of beauty. 'Tis my lot to be so immersed in the giddy whirlpool of life, that I am only able to seize time for study from the hours of repose, at one end or t'other. I have heard it said that you have mis-spent your youth in vain repinings, but methinks time is never to be called wasted that hath been dedicated to the understanding of the master spirits of all ages."

"So you have been informed of my misspent youth? Perchance too you have heard tales of my eccentric conduct, my suspicious guests, my Witches' Sabbaths and Walpurgis Nights?" Gervase asked with a smile, but a certain bitterness in his slow, deep-toned voice.

Sir Walter might have confessed that he had turned a listening ear to some of the gossip about the recluse of the Mount during the days he had been spending in Devon on business connected with the Stannaries; yet it was a genuine interest in the character of the man, and not idle curiosity with regard to the economy of the household which had led to this impromptu visit.

Mad Moll adds to an old Prophecy

If there were any people of doubtful character in the house at present, they did not appear at the supper-board. The white-haired chaplain, Father Bell, gentle and pale, with eyes of child-like clearness and innocence, said grace. Master Birch, more gouty and burdened with flesh than of yore, and as talkative as ever, took the end of the table opposite Gervase, who treated his former tutor with all the intimacy of an old and attached friend, and held him in so warm and affectionate a regard that the thought of parting with him in the days of his adolescence had never entered his head. A butler, as venerable as the priest, stood beside his master's high-backed chair, or hobbled round to fill the graven silver goblets with choice Moselle brought from the cellar in honour of the knight. The dishes were few, but prepared with a subtlety that betrayed a foreign hand, and probably was the foundation of Jim Mace's report at the Manor, of the curious fare served at the master of the Mount's tables.

Sir Walter noticed that his host scarcely touched meat himself, but threw it liberally to the odd collection of animals assembled at his feet. A lame gull, followed by robins and sparrows, hopped through the wide lattices to pick up their share of the feast, unperturbed by the haughty presence of Melpomene. As for the latest accession to the

Mad Moll adds to an old Prophecy

bestiary, the dancer, he was so completely recovered that he insisted on going through his tricks unbidden out of sheer light-hearted gratitude. He threw somersaults, pirouetted on his hind-legs, and died for his country with far more *elan* than he had ever done with his old bullying master's whip cracking over his head.

It was the ascent to the mysterious chamber in the turret, twice interrupted, first by Sir Walter's gazing on the picture and then by the ringing for vespers and the evening meal, which gave the guest the impression that there might be some grounds for Gervase Vidal's reputation amongst the vulgar for wizardry.

The moment they entered the laboratory, he went to the smouldering crucible and stirring it sent weird blue and green lights flickering on the wall, where a crucifix hung, on the globe of a crystal, jars of chemicals, bottled snakes and grinning skulls. One of the lancet windows had been widened and made to open on a pavilion convenient for watching the stars, and from this a rustic stairway led, straight, as it seemed, into the heart of a ravine running to the sea.

Looking down from this window, Sir Walter interrupted a discourse of his host's on a quantity of supposed elixir which he had found near Crockern Tor, with the exclamation—

Mad Moll adds to an old Prophecy

"Is it a sphinx or a woman that sits there so immovable on those steps, Master Vidal?"

The expression of Gervase's face changed from momentary enthusiasm for the subject he was conversing on to annoyance, as he answered—

"'Tis the crazed daughter of the old mariner Scadding, whose cottage overlooks the cove yonder. She doth insist on coming hither, though she hath failed long ago to be of any use as a seer for my crystal. Her method of reading the future is but that of the common Egyptian fortune-tellers—her invocations are futile for my purpose. Yet she comes and sits there constantly, awaiting a fresh summons from me."

"Prythee, summon her now! I remember well Dan and his delightsome wondrous tales of desert islands, strange races, and sea-serpents. Methinks he must be in second childhood now, for he was old when I was a boy. This poor Moll told my fortune then, but I would fain hear it again, and see if the second edition tallies with the first."

Moll, who had been sitting motionless, with her nutcracker profile sharply defined against the sky in the gloaming, started to her feet at the sound of Gervase's voice calling her to come up. As she slowly ascended the steps of the pavilion, her large flashing dark eyes fixed themselves on the magnificent

Mad Moll adds to an old Prophecy

figure of more than six feet in height standing above her, resplendent in one of the court dresses which Sir Walter carried with him even into the wilds of Devon and Cornwall. In peach-coloured satin doublet embroidered with pearls, crimson trunk hose, and short white velvet cape lined with saffron taffeta, with a chain of rubies about his neck, he irradiated the twilight with colour as an hour before the setting sun had dyed the sky.

When she reached the platform, Moll's eyes concerned themselves with the face alone of Gervase Vidal's guest. The last time she had seen it, it had been the face of a fair-skinned, healthy boy, with no up-curling black beard on the long sharp chin. The eyes had been bright and bold then; they were bolder now, and the features more marked by the characteristic lengthiness which even in boyhood had made them peculiar.

"It is still there. The red line which encircles thy throat beneath the ruff," Moll said, coming nearer.

"There is proof enow that she doth recognize me after these many years. She talked of the invisible red line then," Raleigh said, with a laugh.

Heads as handsome as his, and nobler born, were pointed out by the Queen to her foreign ambassadors as she rode with them into the city, rotting on the battlements of London Bridge and Traitors' Gate, yet

Mad Moll adds to an old Prophecy

this favourite, standing on the crest of the wave at the heyday of prosperity, felt so secure of his head that he could hear, without a shudder, the reference of a reputed "wise woman" to the invisible line of red.

"High have you climbed, as I foretold," Moll continued, "but thou art destined to tumble many times from thy pedestal ere the final fall. The first tumble belike is not far off."

"She hath heard of the head-strong fledging lord whom my enemies are striving to thrust 'twixt me and the Queen's grace," thought Raleigh.

"The first tumble that will do thee hurt is when thy inclinations are discovered for a fairer and younger virgin than thy sovereign, when thy heart burns with a love that is real instead of feigned, and thou art a lover indeed, instead of acting the part to cozen the greatest lady in the land."

Sir Walter did not laugh now, but frowned darkly.

"No more of these intervening tumbles, woman," he said; "rather tell me what thou didst mean when thou spakest of a final fall."

"The fall of the axe," muttered Moll, in a scarcely-audible tone. Then she went on, her voice ascending in an ever-shriller crescendo.

"'Tis a long time hence; the bones of Her Majesty will be lying with those of her great fathers, and he who cometh to reign in her stead will mislike thee

Mad Moll adds to an old Prophecy

even as thou art beloved by the Queen. Thy enterprises shall fail; for years thou shalt lie eating thy heart out in captivity, and then thou wilt take up the pen and lay the sword aside."

"'Twas a more golden future than this you painted for me when I was a boy."

"And hath it not been fulfilled? So dazzling bright did it seem then that the vision blinded me to the clouds beyond."

For the first time since she had climbed the stairs Moll unfastened her eyes from Raleigh's face, and looked at the less virile figure of the dreamer beside him.

She cast about in her disordered mind for some flash of intuition which would show her what had attracted these two widely-differing persons temporarily to each other, and she was baffled.

"In the book of fate their names stand writ somewhere on the same page," she muttered half to herself, and turned to go. But Raleigh would not let her depart before he had paid her handsomely for her gloomy prognostications, which he quickly thrust from his thoughts.

A little later when the sky darkened, and it was spangled with the stars, Gervase showed his guest Orion and the Great Bear, and they talked of Galileo and Michael Angelo.

XII

PHILLIDA AND CORYDON

BEFORE riding forth the next day with his retinue to take the high road from Exeter to London, Sir Walter Raleigh walked out from the Mount alone to revisit some of his boyish haunts in the freshness of the June morning.

He rather feared another encounter with Moll, so giving the cottage of the old salt a wide berth, he strolled down from the flagstaff hill to the long shelving shore, where he exchanged greetings with a new generation of bronzed and golden-bearded fisher-folk which seemed to have sprung up since he was last there.

For a moment or two he stood and watched, as he had done a hundred times when a lad, the sepia herring-smacks being launched on the iridescent wavelets and growing smaller and more dream-like the further they got out to sea, and then he turned his back on the fair familiar seascape and took the path inland beside the brown Otter, over the marsh, where at dusk the will-o'-the-wisps used to dance among the

Phillida and Corydon

osiers and marygolds. Here he met visions of himself as an eager young sportsman with fishing-rod, gun or otter-spear, striding knee-deep through the dewy reeds and rushes.

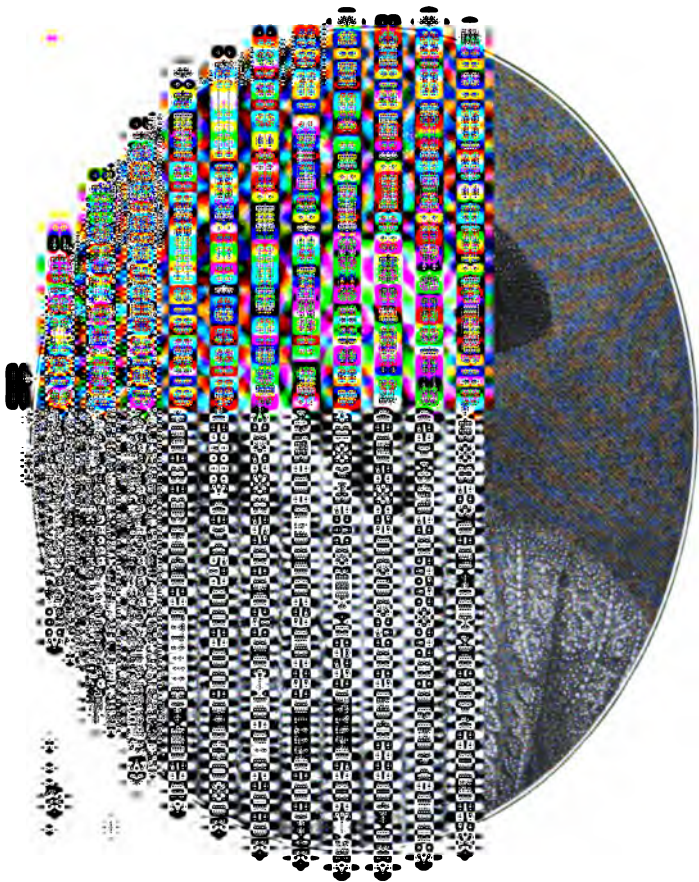
Courtier and Queen's lover that he was, the true nature of the man was not too choked by worldly ambition and mighty schemes to hang, even at thirty-seven, fondly on memories of his early youth awakened by this chance contact with old associations. Absent from his *exigeante* Gloriana, Raleigh felt very like a school-boy playing truant, and revelled in the brief liberty, though of course directly he entered Cynthia's presence again he would pour forth profuse and glib lamentations that his duties as Warden of the Stannaries had torn him from her side for such an immeasurable chasm of time as a few days.

With mingled emotions of tenderness and resentment Raleigh looked at the modest thatched roof of his birthplace, Hayes Farm, with its diamond-paned lattices glittering in the morning sunlight on either side of the rose-embowered porch. When he had reached the apex of his fortunes some years before, Sir Walter Raleigh had written to his father's successor at Hayes, Mr. Duke, and offered to buy the farm. He would, he wrote, give "whatsoever in your conscience you shall deem it worth. I am resolved, if I cannot entreat you, to build at Colliton ; but for

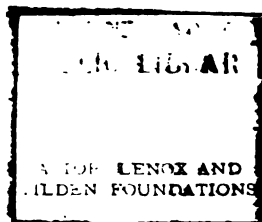
Phillida and Corydon

the natural disposition I have for that place, being born in that house, I had rather seat myself there than anywhere else. . . .”

The letter was preserved for posterity by the said Mr. Duke, in his high oak bureau, but nevertheless he declined to sell the farm. It was for this reason perhaps that Sir Walter now did not lift the latch and disturb the sheep-dogs on the long garden path, but walked on, lingering now and again by other familiar landmarks. He beheld the whole idyllic scene through the rosy haze of personal reminiscence, and saw himself, his brother and gallant half-brothers as boys at every turn. The poetic vein within him, long dormant or only galvanized into life to embellish his “excellent conceits to Cynthia,” was stirred now afresh and ready to find inspiration in a boy and a girl sitting on a stile with their backs to him, a field of waving, shimmering rye before them. The head of the girl was crowned with poppies and cornflowers; the boy wore a rustic hat which he pushed back from his brow as in the animation of their converse he drew nearer to his companion. Their light-headed chatter and laughter reached the Knight’s ears, and at the distance he was from them he discerned a grace and breeding in the pose of the two young figures which told him that this pair, so far as blood went, were a shepherd and shepherdess somewhat after the



at Knole House.



Phillida and Corydon

pattern of those who peopled Sir Philip's *Arcadia*, rather than the genuine bucolic type. Had they turned round, Sir Walter would have recognized the Amazon of Crockern Tor with the mysterious Irish eyes, and Robin would have been astounded at the sight of his hero on foot and unattended in the lane. But "Phillida and Corydon," as Raleigh had already mentally christened them, were busy counting the cherries they had been gathering and comparing their size, and so remained unconscious of the nearness to them for a few fleeting minutes, of one whom, in a time that was coming, they would meet often enough face to face in very different surroundings.

Before he had descended a furzy knoll on which crowds of fox-gloves stood like sentinels, and crossed the stream in Saltern's main street to climb again to the Mount, Raleigh had shaped his quaint verses. Directly he was indoors he asked for quill and ink-horn and put them on paper before breakfasting. He read them to his host in one of the embrasures of the terrace looking out to sea, whilst his horses champed in the yard and the serving-men were seeing to the departure of the baggage.

"Doubtless, Master Vidal, your efforts at verse are cast in a severer and more classic mould—you who have Virgil and Pindar at your finger-ends. But what think'st thou of this duologue for a pastoral

Phillida and Corydon

exercise ?” And he read aloud in his Devonshire bur—

“PHILLIDA’S LOVE CALL TO HER CORYDON.

Corydon. Phillida, my true love, is it she?

I come then, I come then,

I come and keep my flock with thee.

Phillida. Here are cherries ripe for my Corydon,

Eat them for my sake.

Corydon. Here’s my oaten pipe, my lovely one,

Sport for thee to make.

Phillida. Here are threads, my true love, fine as silk.

To knit thee, to knit thee

A pair of stockings white as milk.

Corydon. Here are reeds, my true love, trim and neat,

To make thee, to make thee

A bonnet to withstand the heat.

Phillida. I will gather flowers, my Corydon,

To set in thy cap.

Corydon. I will gather pearls, my lovely one,

To put in thy lap.

Phillida. I will buy my true love garters say

For Sundays, for Sundays,

To wear about his legs so tall.

Corydon. I will buy my true love yellow say

For Sundays, for Sundays,

To wear about her middle small.

Phillida. When my Corydon sits on a hill,

Making melody,

Corydon. When my love goes to her wheel,

Singing cheerily,

Phillida. Sure methinks my true love doth excel

For sweetness, for sweetness,

Our Pan, the old Arcadian knight.

Corydon. And methinks my true love bears the bell

For charms, for charms,

Beyond the nymphs that be so bright.”

“In truth ’tis a neatly tripping and pretty fantasy,”

Phillida and Corydon

said Gervase, whose muse was generally in mourning, and of a slow and melancholy gait like his own. He admired and wondered at the elder poet with his many pre-occupations being able to detach his mind from them, and to throw off thus easily so playful and airy a trifle. Raleigh was not much older in years, but perhaps feeling older in spirit, when later he tried his hand at another pastoral, and wrote an answer to Christopher Marlowe's enchanting Lyric. "Come live with me and be my love," in lines beginning—

"If all the world and love were younger"—

in which he flouted Marlowe's "amber studs" and "beds of roses," and ended with the gentle pessimism—

"But could youth last, could Love still breed,
Had joys no date, had age no need,
Then those delights my mind might move,
To live with thee and be thy love."

Sir Walter took cordial leave of Gervase Vidal from his saddle.

"Farewell till you put in an appearance at court," said he, "and if at any time you have occasion to use me, you will find me a thankful friend."

"I shall never be seen at the court," was the answer. "Jew, Turk, or Atheist may enter there, but not a Papist."

"You are mistaken if you think that, Master Vidal, which I can scarce believe you do. Catholics hold

Phillida and Corydon

many of the posts in Her Majesty's household. She doth love them as well as her Protestant subjects, so long as they are loyal to her person and hold themselves aloof from plots."

For a moment his eyes were bent searchingly on the young man's inscrutable face.

"The test of Catholic gentlemen's loyalty," he went on, "will come when the Spanish galleons are sighted there," he pointed to the flashing sea ; "should I visit these parts again soon, to raise land levies among the men of my native county and Cornwall, I shall count on your aid, Master Vidal."

Gervase made no reply. He stood bowing in his peculiarly courtly manner on the lichen-covered steps of his dilapidated but stately dwelling, till Raleigh and his curvetting cavalcade had clattered out beneath the old Gothic gateway to raise the dust of the highway in clouds as they galloped away.

He bent to stroke Melpomene, who rubbed herself against his legs, and spoke a kindly word to the Dancer, who gazed at him adoringly with pathetic eyes through a mist of hair from a judicious distance, then he turned towards the library, where he said an Ave Maria beneath the portrait of his mother.

He mused on it longer than usual, recalling Sir Walter's rapt attitude as he contemplated the picture.

XIII

THE SECOND RESCUE

IN the golden glory of a September morning, Robin Fane had ridden to school in Ottery with Jim Mace behind bearing his satchel of books.

A shimmering haze of heat hung over the distant woodland slopes, and early as it was the sun's rays were piercing enough to promise a day as hot as any in June. The pageant of autumn had begun in the high hedges, where flamed the scarlet of hips and haws amidst the trails of briony, blackberries and traveller's-joy. In the orchard-closes the gnarled boughs cast their shadows on the dappled grass and were heavy with apples, striking, as the sun shone on them, every note of colour in the gamut of reds, russet-browns and yellows, from the deep crimson of the quarenders to the pale gold of the pippins. Every leaf and cobweb was outlined with glistening dewdrops, and in the marshy meadows the mist was melting into wreaths of gossamer. Above, majestic billowy clouds of lavender and mother-of-pearl processioned royally across the pale blue sky.

The Second Rescue

Such was the look of the world when Robin rode to school, but by afternoon everything had changed. As he rode back, after exasperating his pedagogue more than any of his brothers had ever done by his false quantities and placid inability to show enthusiasm for his tasks, the oppressive sultriness had dulled all the brilliance. It had turned the sky to lead, the sea to ink, and a mutter of thunder came down from the moors.

A storm was coming to put a stop to blackberrying with Iris that evening, just as in August a storm had spoilt an expedition for whortleberries, when after hours of laborious plucking among the short stubby bushes, they had come home with nothing to show for their pains but their purple hands, their baskets having been flooded, and all the whorts swept away.

He pictured Iris ready to start, her feet bare beneath her short red kirtle, armed with a long crooked stick to reach the highest clusters of blackberries in the coppice, at which she always aimed. He saw her pout and frown at the coming storm, and knew that she would say, "Come, let us go. Perchance the storm will keep off after all." But he resolved to be firm, and not to risk her getting drenched, and catching a rheum which might deprive him of his comrade's dear company, out of doors at least, for many a day.

The Esquire was away for two nights on business

The Second Rescue

concerned with the lands he still held on Exmoor ; so Robin and Iris were alone at the Manor, under Doll's and the housekeeper's supervision.

As Robin jumped off his horse he thought that if Iris proved wayward about the blackberrying, he would get Doll to back him up in keeping her under cover till the storm was over. After these virtuous reflections, he looked disappointed to find no expectant Iris in the yard or the hall ; and no Iris was up-stairs, where he ran up and down the corridors and in and out of rooms calling her name.

Doll and Mercy Lane were dragging their spinning-wheels away from the casement, terrified at the lines of blue flame which zig-zagged across the lurid sky, when Robin confronted them.

"Where is she ?" he demanded.

"She ! 'Tis the only she in the world forsooth to thee," gibed Doll. "Mistress Iris rid out at noon alone, except for the falcon in hood and bells that she took with her. She hath not returned, and methought she would be gone to meet you. Lord have mercy upon us ; there's another peal !"

"She will have gone to find quarry towards Sidmouth, belike," Robin said.

"Nay, some lads brought word an hour agone that they had seen her galloping along the cliff's edge, Exmouth way."

The Second Rescue

Robin paled. Iris had been alone then, close to the Mount and Vidal's Cove, the dangerous ground which, since she had realized it was in a way forbidden by her foster-brothers, had possessed a remarkable attraction for her, though she had not teased Robin again with playful threats of inviting herself to sup at the notoriously inhospitable board of Master Gervase Vidal.

"See, here comes the rain. I said we should get it," exclaimed Doll, taking credit to herself for being a weather-prophet, in spite of her fears. "Hearts alive, Mistress Iris will be in five minutes of this as much a drowned rat as when she was wrecked at sea."

"Never fear, Master Robin, she will have gotten under shelter for certain. 'Tis like enow she's safe at the Rectory at Budleigh," suggested Mercy by way of comfort.

"If she were as near as that she would have come straight home," said Robin, gazing in blank dismay at the rain which was coming down in one solid unbroken waterspout from the fiery clouds, dashing furiously on the eaves and flower-borders, and raising a thousand natural fountains all over the paved pleasance.

"'Twill turn the butter in the churn and curdle all the cream. Harken to that clap, a thunderbolt hath fallen somewhere, I'll warrant."

The Second Rescue

"Come, Mercy Lane, we'll get in or under the bed lest we be struck. 'Tis the only safe place methinks. My precious young gentleman, promise thou will not do ought so foolhardly as to go out in this dog's weather to look for Mistress Iris," added Doll between her shrieks of terror. "She is sure to be safe."

"Sure to find a bed to cower under on the open heather or in the fields?" was Robin's contemptuous retort, as he turned on his heel and left the frightened women to go and seek counsel as to what should be done from trusty Jim Mace.

With his father away, his brothers far off in the Indies or on the high seas, Robin felt the burden of his trust weighing heavily on him at this minute, especially as he was tortured with a presentiment that something had befallen Iris, otherwise she would have been home before the storm. The worst shape his undefined fears could take was to think of her with the roof of the St. Clares' hereditary enemy between her and the floods. He would almost rather that she should be galloping through them with the thunder crashing over her head and the lightning blinding her eyes.

There was ground for Robin's anxiety. When Iris, after a morning in which she had been more restive than usual under Doll's tuition in some of the

The Second Rescue

domestic arts, had at last thrown her sampler down impatiently and determined to ride off what Doll called "the fidgets," she had no distinct idea where she was going. First she had ridden a long way in the opposite direction from the Mount, and let fly her falcon in a dell to bind with a passing heron.

Reining in her jennet, with her head thrown back and upraised eyes, Iris watched breathlessly the duel going on in the shining clouds till it ended in a drawn battle, Mirza, her falcon descending neither conqueror nor defeated. The bleeding heron escaped, and Iris smoothing Mirza's ruffled feathers hooded her and abandoned the sport, which seemed to her no sport at all without the exciting presence of other onlookers.

She turned her horse's head in the direction of Budleigh again, passed the Manor-gates, and cantered to the top of that furzy knoll where Sir Walter Raleigh had composed "Phillida's Love Call" a few months back. Here a breeze stirred the bronze fronds of bracken and the few stray pink bells yet lingering on the gaunt velvet stalks of the foxgloves ; but to-day it was a breeze blown from Vulcan's forge that heated instead of cooled. Iris drew rein once more under a clump of firs and looked round her on the wide fair country, variegated and rich, as it swept inland to the woods and slopes against the sky-line

The Second Rescue

and the darkling moor, and becoming wilder as it stretched to the sea. From here the eye could rest on a score or more of white villages and tile-roofed farms and grey churches, on orchards, flowery meadows and rolling fields of ripening corn and maize; but Iris's gaze, as if fascinated, had become fixed on the ancient towers of Vidal's Mount, scarce showing above the foliage of its fine old trees.

What did that strange pale person do there with his birds and beasts and fat human companion from week's end to week's end?

Since the visit to Dartmouth she had not seen him again, but had recalled often the scene in the courtyard of the inn when he had rescued with such cool deliberation the dancing dog from its cruel task-master. His air of composure and nonchalance afterwards as he stood before the Lord Warden, answering his questions at the Court at Crockern Tor, had too impressed her girlish imagination. Then his having clearly taken the fancy of the great courtier-knight, with his wide knowledge of men and the world, counterbalanced in Iris's mind the prejudice of her foster-brothers against the very name of Vidal, and the unreasoning hate of servants and common folk, which she was inclined to attribute to clownish ignorance.

The clouds had gathered by this time into threaten-

The Second Rescue

ing masses which hid the sun, but Iris calculated on being able to gallop to Exmouth and back before they burst. She descended the knoll on the other side, rode slowly up Saltern village and passed the gate-house of Vidal's Mount which jugged on the road. She paused for a moment, feeling a sudden unaccountable desire to rap with her whip on the postern-gate, to see the heavy doors swing back on their rusty hinges to admit her, and to break the enchanted stillness within with the tinkle of her falcon's bells, and the flying echoes of her horse's hoofs.

She only controlled the impulse by taking a quick trot across the heathery country skirting the park to the cliff edge. Again she stopped and looked back at the Mount, which from this side showed the upper windows of its Tudor wing. Why had she ridden away from it? Why not boldly enter this unknown place and reverse the old legend of the Sleeping Princess? She longed to break down all the barriers with which propriety and obedience to antiquated tradition hedged it round and shut her out from it. Fain would she penetrate to the heart of the citadel and surprise its Prince sleeping or awake by her presence, and see for herself the odd *ménage* of which the country people talked in their chimney-corners and in the alehouse. Yet in this venturesome spirit, in

The Second Rescue

which she might have stormed a stronghold far more impregnable than the Mount, she galloped away from it towards the Exe, with flying locks like a Mænad, beneath the lowering sky.

When she turned to come back the thunder was growling around her, but still she kept to the pathless cliff instead of seeking the road. Above Vidal's Cove Iris hesitated whether she should leap the ravine or take the higher path. But before she had decided the heavens opened, showing a silvery-green floor over which darted curls of flame, then there was a crash of thunder, and all was blackness again and the rain began, slashing her like whipcords in eyes and ears. Iris momentarily slackened her hold on the jennet's mouth.

The panic-stricken animal plunged into the ravine, and as it rolled over flung its rider violently against the stump of an elder. The dead branches which stretched over the stream caught her skirts, and there she lay anchored and insensible. A few minutes later Gervase, looking out on the thunderstorm from his tower, saw a riderless horse tearing wildly up the hill, covered with foam and blood.

With his customary compassion for the sufferings of beasts, he ordered that it should be caught and brought into his stables to be put out of its misery if its injuries should be past cure.

The Second Rescue

"And what about the horse's rider?" Master Birch asked. "Does it not concern you also that a human creature must be somewhere near here in an uncomfortable plight, if not in dire peril?"

"Who dost thou think it is?"

"Assuredly the maid from the Manor, for did we not see her in the distance on horseback from the oriel this afternoon? She doth ride like any Amazon; only the fury of the elements or some severe mishap would unseat her."

To Master Birch's surprise, Gervase without another word rose almost with alacrity, threw on an oilskin hooded cloak and went out. The path was already flooded alongside the tiny babbling stream which generally ran like a silver thread through the heart of the ravine, and the stream itself was swollen by the rain into a rushing, roaring torrent that washed everything in its way seawards.

Master Birch, when he recovered from an unwonted attack of speechlessness caused by amazement, was not disposed to risk his gouty person by following, but gave directions to the groom and stable-boy to go to their master's assistance.

Gervase groped his way in the semi-darkness illuminated now and then by vivid forked lightning flashes, and was soon wading in water flowing so turbulently that he could hardly keep his legs. He

The Second Rescue

had not gone far before the tinkle of a falcon's bells guided him to the object of his quest, and he was only just in time. The girl was gradually slipping from her unconscious hold on the rotten branch of the elder, and in another moment the rapidly-rising stream must have swept both her and it, together with up-rooted briars, ferns and boulders, down the steep incline into the sea, which at high tide washed the foot of the ravine. As Gervase's outstretched arms seized her and held her aloft above the water, the branch snapped and was borne away as if it had been made of paper.

Iris half regained her senses with the roar of the water in her ears and the sting of the rain in her face, and the years which she had spent for the most part as happy English country girls spend the years of childhood and budding maidenhood, seemed obliterated as if they had never been. The night of the wreck came back to her, the night which those with whom she had been brought up had carefully refrained from speaking of before her, lest its terrors should be revived in her memory. She fancied that she heard above the roar of the surging stream the despairing Ave Marias and cries of the drowning sailors whose pet and plaything she had been, and the arms that grasped her now were the arms in which she had then nestled for safety, which had wrapped her about with

The Second Rescue

so loving a protection, which she had awakened to find no longer round her.

Under the spell of the illusion that had thus taken possession of her still half-dazed senses, Iris clung tightly to her triumphant Perseus, triumphant because he had cheated the monster dashing against the cliffs below of one victim at least.

He fought the current upwards, staggering under his burden, till the servants who had come after him threw him a rope from the top of the steep banks, which rose sheer like a precipice on either side of the ravine. With this, and almost superhuman strength which was not his ordinarily, he gained the summit after many painful slippings on the loosened muddy earth.

When he reached the pavilion his clothes were torn, and beneath them he felt the rain running in rivulets from neck to heels; his face was scratched by the briars, and his left arm almost wrenched from its socket, and "the maid from the Manor" still clung to him, calling him by some name in an outlandish tongue, a name which had not been heard on her lips since the strange outbreak on that evening long ago when she had lisped her first Protestant prayer at Doll's knee.

XIV

UNBIDDEN GUESTS

THE rain had ceased, and a wan moon and a few stars shone faintly in the now placid sky as Robin with Jim Mace returned from a vain search for Iris.

If she had not come back in the meantime, Jim said there would be nothing for it but to raise the alarm in the hamlet of Poer Hayes and the villages of Budleigh and Saltern that the country might be scoured in all directions.

"Hearken! I hear Mirza's bells. Then hath she surely come," the boy exclaimed in joyous relief, springing from his horse. But when he saw that the falcon had been brought home on the wrist of a servant wearing the yellow badge of the Vidals, who stood holding two horses before the door, his heart sank again.

"Master Birch awaits your coming within," said the man. "He would speak with you in the absence of the Esquire your father."

Robin instinctively put his hand on the rapier to which he had been promoted on his last birthday.

Unbidden Guests

He saw himself buckling on armour and leading an assault on the Mount if Iris were being detained there, fighting his way furiously into the heart of it and dragging her from the ogre's clutches. In this spirit of swashbuckling gallantry Robin entered the old ex-tutor's jolly presence.

With considerate suavity Master Birch related as much as he knew of the accident which had befallen Iris and where and how the master of the Mount had found her.

When he had done Robin was figuratively disarmed, though his fingers still clasped the hilt of his rapier.

"I thank you, sir, for your civility in coming hither yourself with this news of my foster-sister's mishap," he said ; "by your leave, I and Jim Mace, my father's most trusty servant, will now bear you company to Vidal's Mount and fetch her home."

"Her hurts are of too serious a nature, methinks, for her to be moved from where she resteth, for many a day to come," Master Birch said.

"But she cannot stay at the Mount," exclaimed the boy. "'Tis not fitting."

"And why not?" asked the old man, with a twinkle in his eye.

"There are no women in the house," murmured Robin, blushing hotly.

Unbidden Guests

"Aye, is that it? 'Tis odd, indeed, how well acquainted Mr. Vidal's neighbours seem to be with the arrangements of his household. But you may be easy in your mind, young Master Fane, for this night, as chance will have it, ladies are expected at the Mount, none less than my Lady Bulkeley, second wife of Mr. Vidal's kinsman who was his guardian ere he came of age. 'Tis true, my lady will scarce be an invited guest. Having still two daughters left out of ten, who are unwed, she hath grown exceeding bold and daring, and invited herself. She writ that she would take no denial, and forewarned us of her arrival at the Vesper hour this evening, but the storm will have delayed her, and I ride now post towards Exeter to bring her and her party forward the rest of the way. Thus you see there is no reason to be more anxious about your foster-sister than if she were lying sick here instead of yonder under Mr. Vidal's roof. We are all no mean leeches over there, and I promise thee that with or without the aid of a physician she shall be restored as rapidly as her injuries allow . . ."

"But I must at least see her—and to-night," Robin broke in impetuously on Master Birch's garrulity.

He shook his head. "Neither to-night, nor to-morrow, nor the next day, Master Robin. Our

Unbidden Guests

patient must be kept quiet. Quiet is a more effectual panacea, as I have told Mr. Vidal, than the thousand and odd recipes for physics and salves that he was at the pains to collect when abroad from the Italian Jesuits who have gotten them from the Chinese and Buddhist priests. So I wish you good-night, and be not downcast; early in the morning a messenger shall bring you news of how your sister fares."

Master Birch had taken his leave and trotted off to find the benighted Lady Bulkeley, before Robin quite clearly realized the situation. Iris had been thrown off her horse in the thunderstorm, and in her distressful plight he, Robin, had not been near at hand, not raised a finger to help her, and instead had left her to be rescued by another, the bogey of the Mount, in whose domain she lay now, being tended by strangers when she would most sorely need her friends.

Had any one told him the night before that he would have gone to bed, in the face of so appalling a catastrophe, and slept his usual sound, healthy sleep, he would have flouted the idea and sworn to die a hundred deaths, rather than act so tame a part. Yet, after Master Birch's assurances, what else could he do?

So Robin went to bed feeling, it is true, that he deserved to have his pillow haunted by the indig-

Unbidden Guests

nant shades of the absent Kit, Hal, and Frank, especially Frank, whose empty bed gleamed beside his own in the darkness. But though he was very miserable, more miserable than he had ever been before in his young life, the crisp, fair curls had not tossed long on the pillow before Robin sank into a slumber that was dreamless till just before cockcrow, when he dreamed that he saw Iris on the pleasance. A gold star shone in the blackness of her hair, and she swept tinsel trailing draperies after her along the dewy grass, like the mummer who had acted Queen Dido of Carthage at Ottery Fair.

"Perchance, we are too many. I have brought my daughter's women as well as my own."

Lady Bulkeley looked round her, at the coats of mail, cuirasses and casques with which the hall of the Mount was hung, and thought involuntarily of the wicked old Vidals who had worn them.

"Madame, had you brought a retinue as large as any which accompanies her Majesty's progresses, you would be as welcome as flowers in May to-night."

"And why so particularly to-night?" asked the lady, smiling at Master Birch's pretty speech. Her ardour had been somewhat damped by the storm,

Unbidden Guests

following on other uncomfortable experiences attending her journey into Devon, such as narrowly escaping being waylaid by robbers, and getting stuck fast in the mire of an impassable lane. She had almost repented the temerity which had brought her to beard her husband's kinsman in his retirement when Master Birch had ushered her into the great, chilly stone hall, where there was none but the aged chaplain and butler to receive them.

Nevertheless, she was rather relieved at the non-appearance of their host, when she looked at her daughter's lank locks and general air of unbecoming limpness. Mrs. Hetty's hair needed pomade and dry weather to keep it in curl under her coif, and before feeling herself equal, in obedience to her mother, to attempt the capture of a Benedict's heart, she would have to be much titivated by her women, in front of the mirror in the privacy of her chamber. "I am bidden by Mr. Vidal to make excuses for his not being down-stairs to receive your ladyship. An unforeseen circumstance compels him to act the surgeon to-night, to a young lady whose horse was affrighted and bolted during the storm at a short distance from here."

"A young lady!" exclaimed the self-invited guest in ill-concealed consternation. The last thing she had expected to find in the house of the recluse

Unbidden Guests

and reputed woman-hater was a potential rival to her Hetty!

"A slip of a maid, and though uncommon tall, may be betwixt some thirteen and fourteen summers," explained Master Birch with an amused smile, for he read the lady's thoughts as easily as he could have read the open page of Boccaccio that fluttered on the carved desk beneath the single flaring torch which lighted the hall.

Master Birch's information as to the young lady's age was not so likely in those days as these, to set the mind of a designing mother at rest. Elizabethan maidens were chosen as brides, and often entered on their teens and the cares of matrimony together, instead of being allowed to linger

"With reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet."

"I trust indeed that her hurt is not serious withal?" Lady Bulkeley went on with a show of kindly interest.

"She is cut and bruised, and hath one leg sprained. 'Twas a bad fall from a great height, and she would doubtless have been taken down by the force of the swollen stream to the sea, had she not mercifully been caught by the kirtle on the branch of a tree."

"Alack-a-day, like Absalom!" exclaimed Lady Bulkeley inaptly.

Unbidden Guests

"I said by the kirtle, not hair," corrected Master Birch, leading the way into the inner wainscotted hall, where the table was laid with snowy napery, silver goblets, and flagons, and dishes of fruit and clotted cream in readiness for a meal. The ladies eyed the table approvingly, but having supped at a half-way house, where they had sheltered from the storm, the elder said—

"The hour being so late, sir, we would fain be shown our chambers at once, and if we may be served there with a hot wine posset, a wing of capon and some of your tempting rich cream, methinks we shall not starve till the morning."

"Her ladyship maketh herself at home," thought Master Birch, as more torches were lighted, and servants began moving to and fro at her bidding. Then as the unwonted sounds of rustling farthingales and feminine chatter died away on the stairs and in the passages, the chaplain said grace, and he and the old tutor sat down alone to the untasted meal. And Melpomene, the zebra-mouse, the lame gull, and the Dancer, gathered round the table, eager mendicants for their long-deferred supper.

XV

IRIS AND HER CHIRURGEON

NONE of the bustle of the guest's arrival had reached the turret-chamber opening on the pavilion.

Here Iris lay on a cushioned settle sometimes used by Gervase as a bed when he wished to keep vigil in his laboratory over a nocturnal experiment in sight of the crucible, or watch an eclipse of the moon, or the fiery tail of a comet sweep over the heavens.

As Master Birch had said, Gervase had appointed himself chirurgeon, and was bringing all the medical lore he had gathered in his wide reading and erratic studies to bear on the case. He had been obliged to resort to Moll Scadding as the only woman within immediate hail of the Mount, to help him in the emergency as nurse. Mr. Vidal's summons to Moll was accompanied by the astonishing command to bring with her female raiment, and Moll had gone to the chest where her unused wedding trousseau had been put away so many years ago, and took out some of the garments, spun by herself from the finest flax in the days when she had been an expectant bride

Iris and her Chirurgeon

The old green cloak was still lying in the chest ; and with a sudden inspiration lighting up her dark, sphinx-like features, Moll had unfolded it, flung it over her shoulder, and with the bundle of linen beneath, hurried out to follow the groom who had brought his master's message.

Dan, now far advanced in second childhood, took little notice of his daughter's goings and comings, and spent most of his days sitting over the smoky hearth, muttering "Glorious Frank Drake," and setting the ships on his earrings in motion with his palsied head.

So soon as Moll had begun to remove the girl's rain-sodden clothing she had fallen into another swoon, and from this all the restoratives which Gervase pressed between her lips were for long powerless to rouse her.

"Her limbs are sound, 'tis the head is the trouble," was Moll's verdict from the foot of the couch, whence she retired after performing her part of undressing and arranging Iris in her own ancient, yellowed, lavender-scented bridal smock.

"But there is no bleeding from the head," Gervase said.

"'Tis within. The brain belike," Moll answered, tapping her forehead ominously, and she relapsed into silence.

After the first flush of triumph Gervase had felt

Iris and her Chirurgeon

in bringing Iris safely up the precipitous side of the ravine and landing her on *terra firma*, he had set himself to the task of tending her with the same impartiality as he tended all creatures in distress. But it must be confessed, that as the hours passed and he sat with the wise woman watching every breath, listening in the silence of the night to every heart-beat and pulse-throb, an anxiety akin to nothing that he had ever experienced for any sick beast in his infirmary took possession of him. In spite of himself he became conscious of the beauty and the sex of the fair young figure lying there so immovable and white. He recalled the eager clasp of her arms about his neck, and the perilous moment when he held her above the rushing stream, and a thrill passed through him, for till then no woman's arms had touched him since his mother had folded him in hers.

At last there was a movement, a flutter of the black-fringed ivory lids. Iris slowly opened her eyes, and gazed dreamily at the face bending over her.

Once before Gervase had seen those eyes open on the world after a period of unconsciousness, and had been not at all moved by the sight. The waif lying in the blanket beneath the June sky with the sun dancing on her barbaric bracelets had filled him with a boyish sense of shyness, a desire to turn his back as quickly as courtesy would permit, especially when it

Iris and her Chirurgeon

was suggested that he might rightfully claim her as his property. Then long brooding on a shock of grief had made his brain so sensitive to hallucinations that he had imagined the sea, his enemy, had cast up the woman-child at his feet in seeming compensation for what it had taken away, only to mock and embarrass him. He was glad that others had been before him, and were anxious to relieve him of the sea's unwelcome gift. The years had passed, and the gift that he had refused grew up, much cherished and loved, not far away. Yet he heard with indifference Master Birch's occasional references to the maid of the Manor's bonny looks, and her hunting and hawking with the Esquire's sons, and being as fleet-footed as a deer and agile as any boy. He had no curiosity about her hoydenish ways, no wish to see her, but now and then he had seen her in the distance with unseeing eyes.

This afternoon when Master Birch called to him to look at her from the oriel as she rode along the cliffs, he had scarcely glanced up from the enchanting old-world love story of "Eros and Psyche," as told by Apuleius in *The Golden Ass*, which he was trying to render into English verse.

How was it then that, when later he was told she must be in danger somewhere near at hand, he had leapt up feeling stung to instant action, had gone as

Iris and her Chirurgeon

if guided by some unseen power, swift and straight as a dart to the very spot where she was?

He could not and did not try to account for it, he only realized that his turn had now come to experience something of that pride of ownership with which the three boys had swelled that morning long ago when they stood round the shipwrecked mite of a girl and exclaimed, "She is ours; ours by right." He had readily acquiesced in their right, but now he knew that, even after these years in which she had lived under their father's roof as his daughter, she was more his than theirs. There was some invisible, intangible, mysterious link between him and her which, though the dawning knowledge of it had only come to him in the last few hours, filled the starved heart of the recluse with a joy it had never known before.

A falling star shot across the sky and drew an ejaculation from Moll, but if all the planets in the firmament had dropped to earth at that moment Gervase would have been too engrossed with the twin stars gazing at him from the pillow to turn round. He was lost in contemplation of their fathomless depths, till the lips smiled and the soft corners of the curved mouth broke into a triangular dimple. His mother, he remembered, when she laughed had shown just such a dimple. Was this the tie? This one point of resemblance between the dark-haired girl

Iris and her Chirurgeon

and his mother with the golden hair and turquoise eyes? Then the music of her voice fell on his ear, not crying now wildly the strange name as it had done when he carried her up the slippery bank, but low and soft, asking a question.

"Who is that? The woman who sitteth there looking towards the window."

"One who bears, as he doth, a grudge against the sea," Moll responded for herself.

"You hate the sea. Why do you hate it?"

"Because it took our best beloved."

"My father and my mother were perchance drowned too, but I hate not the sea. I hear the sound of it always. 'Tis never quite still or silent. Perchance my mother is a mermaid now at the bottom of the sea, and my father a sea-king. There are great palaces down there with arches of coral and gates of pearl and floors of shell . . . bigger than the house of the banshee under the lake. . . . Doth she still comb her hair, I wonder. Methinks I hear the banshee's song ; no, 'tis the sea—the sea moaning. . . ."

So Iris babbled on, entrancing her listener. For in her rambling she spoke not at all of her life at the Manor and its inmates, and it seemed as if in her mind the second accident were confused with the first, and the years which lay between gone from her memory.

XVI

EXTRACTS FROM A LADY'S LETTERS

I

"HUSBAND,—Since I writ to recount to thee some of the foul mishaps of our journey hitherto, our host, thy extraordinary kinsman, hath been pleased to bestow on us more of his company than heretofore. I have sent my women in turn to sit beside the young gentlewoman who lieth in the turret-chamber, still suffering ills from her misadventure in the storm. He permits of this, as well he may, having no woman servant of his own ; but mine and Het's entry to the turret is as yet forbid by him, as he feareth 'twould too greatly excite the invalid.

"'Tis, methinks, a strange situation, but all is strange here, and strangest of all is thy kinsman himself. One minute he appeareth more gracious than I could have conceived him, with quite a gentle manner, but

Extracts from a Lady's Letters

the next he stiffens into haughtiness again. I do despair of Het's pretty face ever stirring him from his melancholic fantasies, for he hath no eyes for her, even when she sits on his right hand at the board, in her Flemish ruff and carnation velvet petticoat. Me-seemeth he delights more in looking on the ugly mongrel that he doth ask to dance a measure as if the brute were Sir Christopher Hatton himself, and when 'tis over, gives thanks, and claps his hands. I have dropped him the hint that Het is as fair and nimble a dancer as her elder sisters, who have danced at court to the admiration of the Queen's Majesty's dancing Chancellor, but he shows no disposition to see if 'tis true. The first time she played on the lute, he wore an air as of being in bodily pain, and asked if the strings were tuned ; the second time, he went from the room under the pretext of seeing to the sick young gentlewoman's physic. Het doth vow she would be frightened to wed with him, and saith he chills her like his great stone hall and passages. Her fears are early, for I have had no occasion or encouragement to say ought of a match. The stout factotum, Master Birch, doth protest that these exceeding fair lands yield no great riches. Tin hath lain buried on the estate untouched till lately, when, by order of the Lord Warden, 'tis being dug for ; but your kinsman hath resigned his right to the ground. Yet those

Extracts from a Lady's Letters

whom he hath endowed with the benefit thereof, love him as little as they did before.

"He hath truly a very ragged crew of servants, and so aged for the most part that only a groom or two are proper fellows. So far as I can see, he preferreth his walls to be hung with cobwebs to tapestry, albeit there are coffers carven and inlaid with ivory, in which an abundance of fine hangings are stuffed away. Methinks his house, though so grey and solid from the approach, hath sore need of repairs, and parts of it threaten to tumble. A piece of plaster from the music-gallery fell whilst we dined yesterday. The oratory and chapel with the coloured saints in the windows and images and pictures are a deal gayer than the living-rooms.

"Yesternight one of Het's women mightily affrighted her by a screeching in the middle of the night. Het asked if 'twas a ghost she had seen. 'Nay,' quoth she; 'I have not seen a ghost, but *heard* forty. All the imps in hell could not make a dolefuller noise.' Belike 'twas the sea, although 'tis said voices and apparitions do verily proceed from the dungeon below. I repent me somewhat not to have brought Cis hither instead of Het on the errand (chuckle not and say 'fool's errand,' dear husband, till thou knowst what the upshot proveth to be). Cis hath more archness, and methinks might win a smile easier from thy kinsman. Het complains that

Extracts from a Lady's Letters

his grave mein and sombre attire do much weigh
down her spirits. . . .

"Most dutifully and lovingly, thy

"WIFE.

*"Writ this Holyrood Day from Vidal's Mount,
in the County of Devon*

*"To SIR GEORGE BULKELEY, KNIGHT, at
his House over against the Thames in
Richmond."*

II

"I did close and dispatch my last packet ere I related how one, Esquire Fane, a not far distant neighbour of your kinsman, is the foster-father of the hurt young gentlewoman in the turret. He cometh hither to the drawbridge daily on foot or on horseback, to learn how she does, and his youngest son, a goodly boy, beareth him company. The father hath the stature of a Goliath, and the son is of a ruddy countenance, like David. There is, I fear, little love lost 'twixt thy kinsman and these neighbours of his, for the simple reason that they have not hitherto been on terms of friendship or even barely acquainted. 'Tis, methinks, passing curious that this accident should have brought Mistress Iris into what is held to be the enemy's camp by the good folks hereabout. At any rate, 'tis

Extracts from a Lady's Letters

clearly held so to be by the young David I have just mentioned, who, each time that he and his father are denied an entrance to the maiden, turns away in ever greater wrath and impatience, biting his lips and clenching his fists. Mr. Fane hath appealed to me to know my opinion of her state, and whether she is not now fit to be moved home at once, as to which I was forced to admit my ignorance, not having seen with my own eyes how she fareth, but my women report that she is not fevered and seemeth to be little ill, but strange in her converse. Her content is to tarry where she is, and she appeareth not to miss her friends, or to suffer aught of home-sickness. . . . Goliath, Master Birch saith, hath three elder sons beyond sea. Two have been starving awhile in that new country which Sir Walter Raleigh hath named Virginia, after our gracious Majesty, but which, despite its name, hath such ill-luck. 'Tis thought they are at present homeward bound, to have a part in repulsing the talked-of Spanish invasion. Brave lads they are, I doubt not, and handsome too if they take after the father. He is with regard to offspring in the reverse position to thyself, his lady having borne him all sons and no daughters, instead of all daughters and no sons. 'Twas his darling desire to have a daughter, so he hath adopted this maid, who was a foundling, cast up on this coast after a shipwreck from none knoweth where. Methinks she was born under an adventurous

Extracts from a Lady's Letters

and watery star, for a second time hath she been rescued from drowning. . . .

"Now I will relate of a somewhat vexatious little incident which happened yester-eve. Our Het was looking her prettiest in the close-bodied gown of black flowered satin with black hanging sleeves, with white close sleeves beneath that showeth the roundness of her arms, and that rich ruby I gave her bedropped with pearls on her neck. She was sitting within the window toying with the leaves of a little book lying there, for in this house books do lie everywhere about, straying far from their proper places, as do the animals, when at last methought your kinsmans' glance did really rest on Het with some interest and approval. He sat not far off with his olpharion against his knee, the cat on his shoulder and the dancing-cur at his feet, and methought he watched Het intently, almost as if his eyes were taking count of how many times her kirtle was trimmed round with a silver braid. Of a sudden Het sprang up with a scream on to the seat of the window, shaking out her skirts with a violent gesture. 'Twas the tame striped mouse that your kinsman had been looking at, as it ran up her kirtle so lightly that she did not discover it till it was on her stomacher, which gave her such a fright she declares she could not forbear to stand up and yell. 'Twould have been more sensible of Het to have controlled her fear, and to have held her tongue,

Extracts from a Lady's Letters

or have made merry of it, as Cis, I don't doubt, would have done. But instead of laughing off the matter, she most absurdly shed tears withal, and your kinsman picked up the creature from the floor, and caressing it, wondered how it could appear to some eyes so alarming a monster, and then again he went from the room, and without playing the tune he had promised. We have not heard a note from his instrument yet. When I was chiding Het for her folly, Master Birch came in, and began telling us, how your kinsman doth believe animals have souls that have been in the bodies of human beings, and that they may pass into such again. He doth truly hold divers strange doctrines for one reputed a zealous Catholic."

III

"To-day, I have to confess, dear husband, that as thou saidst before we started, nothing is like to come of my sojourn in this place in so far as it concerneth our Het's future. Yet I am not minded withal to return home post to Richmond, for though thy kinsman is not merry he entertaineth me much, if without intention on his part. I have discovered that I wronged him when I declared him blind to a pretty face. His blindness to Het's methinks cometh from his being extreme alive to the beauty of another. This Mistress Iris hath a beauty of a rare sort, as I

Extracts from a Lady's Letters

can bear testimony, inasmuch as the maid is now visible, having come forth from the chamber in the turret. The first time that she came forth your kinsman carried her down-stairs; but she was able to walk, only a little lame from her sprain, across the library floor. She was oddly apparelled in a plain loose garment of white, over which, as if flung in haste to protect her from chill draughts, was a very cumbersome old cloak, lined with many pockets, and a patch on the back. My woman saith this old cloak hath been spread over her feet, serving as a coverlid whilst she lay abed. Her hair, fine as silk and black as night, was unbound, without coif or snood, and her eyes struck me nigh dumb, so wondrous large and lustrous are they, and so unusual in colour that at first one scarce knows whether they are blue, grey, black, or purple, or all mingled together. With these eyes she looked at me when Master Gervase presented me to her, as if she were in a dream, and saw through and beyond me, but she exchanged a few courtesies naturally enow. Then he settled her down in the oriel, and taking a seat at her feet, he did begin a-reading to her from *Bandello*, of the loves of a froward young pair called 'Romeo and Giuletta.' And as for myself and Het we might have been the door-posts for any heed he paid us withal. And so it hath gone on since. For hours they sit together thus; he reading or

Extracts from a Lady's Letters

playing melancholy soft airs, and when he hath finished, she recounteth strange tales to him, of giants and warriors and princesses who have been bewitched into water-sprites—'banshees' she calleth them. And she useth quaint gestures with her hands, and mimics voices that she hath heard—but where? Not in the house of her upbringing yonder, methinks, where her foster-father and brother are chafing sore to get her back. . . ."

IV

"'Twas not likely that your kinsman would much longer be able to deny Esquire Fane access to Mistress Iris under the pretext of her ill-health, for the roses have returned to her cheeks, and she limps not at all. So this day he, the Esquire, came and hath taken her away, though not without some curious parleying. It happened that Mistress Iris was taking the air—the day being fair and more like spring than autumn—on the crumbling terrace, above the fishpond, with the old cloak thrown on her shoulders, and Het for once was in her company instead of Master Gervase, he being in his oratory. Mr. Fane and I engaged in some friendly converse together till your kinsman came to him in the library, when the Esquire did thank your kinsman for his care and leeching of his foster-daughter, and said that her

Extracts from a Lady's Letters

health now being completely restored, he would relieve him of her further entertainment, and had brought a litter to carry her to the Manor. Master Gervase answered with great loftiness that Mistress Iris must be taken nowhere against her will, and he did not think it would be her will to go from the Mount.

"'Dear heart,' quoth Mr. Fane, when the maid came in from the garden on Het's arm, 'tis good to see thee mended, and I am come to bring thee home.'

"'Could'st believe it? Instead of flying to him who hath had the rearing and nurturing of her almost from babyhood, she stood still and regarded him with coldness as if he were a stranger. Then she did put out her hand to your kinsman nigh supplicatingly, and said—

"'I have no home. Say 'tis true . . . I saw it in the crystal burning in flames till 'twas nought but a heap of black ashes which the winds have blown away. My home was not here, but far away in another country methinks, a fairer country to me than this, because 'tis mine own. I would kiss the dear green earth could I find it. Perchance I may sail further in the ship with red sails. Nay, but there is no ship with red sails now. 'Tis gone down.'

"Master Gervase had taken her hand and drawn her towards the portrait of Sir Gervase, his father, with his lady and child, that hangeth in the library.

Extracts from a Lady's Letters

“ ‘Alack then she still wandereth in her mind,’ the poor Esquire did exclaim, greatly perplexed.

“ In the meantime your kinsman had now gotten Mistress Iris close beneath the portrait, and was pointing to the face of his sweet lady mother therein, looking the while nearly at Mistress Iris who raised her eyes and then quoth she, with a little cry—

“ ‘ ’Tis the same, the self-same that bent over me in the crystal. ’Tis she that——’ and she lifted her arms high so that the old heavy cloak slipped from her shoulders to the ground. Whereupon she dropped her arms, and turning round with a changed mien did speak to her foster-father as if she had not known he was there before, and said—

“ ‘ I am quite recovered now, father, of my hurts. I can never be thankful enow to Mr. Vidal for what he hath done. I owe him my life. And these ladies too, father, are deserving of thy thanks, for they and their women have done me many good services whilst I have been sick. And now I am fit and ready to come home with thee to Robin. How doth Robin fare, and hast heard yet if Kit and Hal come for Yuletide ?’

“ Then the Esquire caught her to his stalwart breast and many endearments passed ’twixt them. Your kinsman looked on, very white and grave, but said naught, and made no further interference to prevent the departure of Mistress Iris with her foster-father.

Extracts from a Lady's Letters

After they were gone he picked up the cloak from the floor, which meseemeth is bewitched, and took it away with him to his laboratory in the turret. 'Tis there he keeps the crystal in which Mistress Iris clearly hath seen curious things. 'Tis not to be wondered at with such eyes as hers that she can see beyond the ken of ordinary mortals. . . ."

V

"We shall set out this Tuesday sen-night from here to visit my Lady Grenville at Bideford. 'Tis not my desire to wear out our welcome at Vidal's Mount, though now I think o' it, it was only good Master Birch that bid us any welcome, not your kinsman, of whom I can only say he hath but forborne openly to wish us gone. He showeth our Het as little attention since Mistress Iris went as before, and Het so mislikes him that 'tis useless to linger here in the hopes of their taking to each other. But there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, and doubtless many young men of suitable fortune and position and religion are to be had who will make Het and Cis excellent husbands such as their sisters are blessed with. Master Gervase cannot bring himself to set foot in the Manor, even to see how his late patient does, perchance because 'twas once the abode of the hereditary enemies of his house. I accompanied

Extracts from a Lady's Letters

Master Birch thither on foot yesterday, the day being bright and fine, and was satisfied that Mistress Iris was well and content to be at home again. She was romping at push-pin with the fair-haired foster-brother and seemed very merry. In truth she is a winsome and comely enough maid, but methinks she must stand in need of more feminine oversight than she doth enjoy. Her education hath been more that of a boy than meet for a young gentlewoman. . . . Thus I bethought me of making proposals to Mr. Fane that we should take his foster-daughter into our household at Richmond for a time, to be trained and perfected under my eye in housewifery and womanly accomplishments, to which he made reply graciously, that he thought at some time he should be well pleased to consider such a plan for Mistress Iris's good. . . . 'Twas not said within hearing of the young folks themselves, or I don't doubt Master Robin would have looked as fiercely resentful again as when he had perforce day after day to turn away from the Mount being denied his playmate. . . .

*"To my very good husband, SIR GEORGE
BULKELEY, KNIGHT, at his house
near the Thames in Richmond."*

Note.—Lady Bulkeley, according to the fashion of her time, spelt as she liked. But for the convenience of readers her spelling has been modernized at the risk of depriving her epistolary style of a quaintness which gives a certain piquant charm to the original documents.

BOOK III

XVII

THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD

STREETS of tall timbered houses with overhanging pointed gables and carven fronts, some gloriously gilded and painted, from the diamond lattices of which fine London lasses laughed down on their fathers' prentices in the throng beneath, a throng of all sorts and conditions of men : merchants, both Italian and English, in their flowing furred gowns ; rich citizens' wives, painted, bedizened and bewigged, bearing as much of their husbands' wealth as they could crowd on their ample backs ; gallant young gentlemen of the Inns of Court, who never opened a law-book ; mariners and swaggering adventurers returned from foreign climes with cutlasses and rapiers which had been steeped in Spanish blood ; sellers of fruits and tansies and perfumes ; quacks and ballad-mongers, mountebanks, beggars and bear-leaders ;—such were the streets of London through which the great maiden Queen delighted to ride and dazzle the eyes

The Captain of the Guard

of her adoring people with the barbaric magnificence of her jewelled person, answering their fervent greetings with gracious becks and smiles. Her outbursts of temper, her oaths and boxes on the ear were reserved for her courtiers, ladies-in-waiting and maids-of-honour in the privacy of her closet and council-chamber. Into this London, which Spenser called "the merrie city, his kindly nurse," in which Shakespeare held horses and made himself as "motley to the view" as an actor, and gained the applause of his contemporaries by his *Venus and Adonis*, but the admiration of the world and the ages to come by his *Hamlet*; a cheerful lyric London of bold spirits, noble knights, sweet poets, with a substratum of thieves and cut-throats, it is true, rode Esquire Fane one clear cold day in January, with his youngest boy Robin at his side and Jim Mace behind.

It was the beginning of the second year after the Spanish galleons, "tall as church spires," had been swept from the Channel by the three great admirals, Drake, Hawkins and Frobisher, with the help of such a storm that none in the memory of man had ever been known to rage so long and fiercely. It strewed the coast of Ireland with the flower of Spain's nobility, and grandees and hidalgos, in velvet coats and chains of gold, perished there miserably of

The Captain of the Guard

starvation, or at the hands of their co-religionists, who extended to them none of the succour they had expected, but instead, plundered and butchered them.

All England still vibrated and thrilled at the thought of that recent triumph over the power of Spain and Rome combined, and Englishmen held their heads higher and felt their hearts throb with patriotic ardour as they recalled the scene of delirious enthusiasm when their Queen, as generalissimo of the army, came in martial pomp, wearing a breastplate over her farthingale, to Tilbury camp and addressed her soldiers in a stirring harangue. This was Elizabeth's most glittering hour, when, at the age of fifty-five, after reigning thirty years, she achieved the height of her popularity. Only her admirals remembered that, through her short-sighted economy, brave sailors were kept on such short rations at Plymouth that hundreds languished and died in hospital, instead of taking part in the great naval duel for which their souls had yearned.

Esquire Fane's eldest son, his fine frame weakened by yellow fever in the tropics, and a long struggle against want and disorganization with the ill-starred early colonists of Virginia, had been one of those who came home to grapple with the Spaniards in his native seas, but succumbed to disease on shore before the fleet put out from the Sound. Thus for the Fanes

The Captain of the Guard

the joyful retrospect of the invincible Armada's defeat was tempered with a deep personal sorrow, and the Esquire thought with a pang, as he looked on his youngest boy in his fresh and vigorous youth, all eagerness to be started in life, of how Kit, his first-born, had set out on his first voyage, some years before, just such another picture of lusty young health and manly beauty, and as full of high hopes, and how he now lay beneath the sod in a quiet graveyard looking towards the Atlantic, over which he would never sail again.

Father and son, with the old servitor behind them, brown as berries even in January from their out-of-door life, as they rode through Cheap, seemed to bring a scent of the red Devonshire lanes with them into the atmosphere of London. Almost at a glance they could be recognized as hailing from further afield than Kent or Surrey, or other of the home counties. Yet they were not of an unfamiliar type, for the lads and men of Devon abounded in the London inns and streets. Was it not a man of Devon who was in possession of that fair palace on the Strand with its face to the river, once the allotted residence of the Bishops of Durham, whither Esquire Fane and his boy were now bound? When Mr. Fane dismounted at the gate-house and asked to see the great Sir Walter, his chief claim on the

The Captain of the Guard

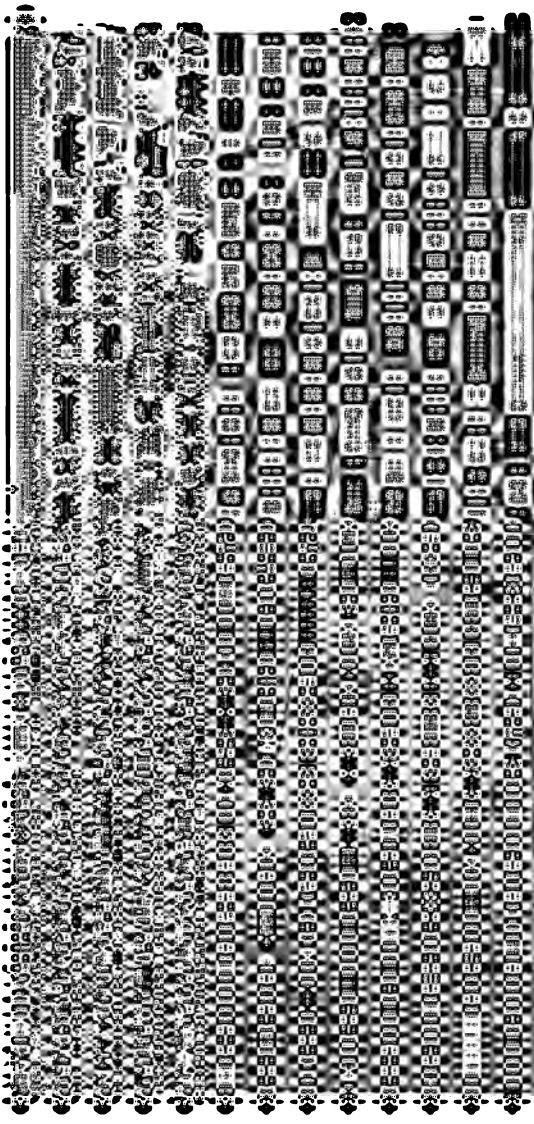
knight's time was that he came from the Manor of Budleigh in the county of Devon, and that his predecessors there had been neighbours and friends of the Raleghs of Hayes Farm. The slender link of being a fellow Devonian and of his sons having been in Virginia, had brought the Esquire to petition the Captain of Her Majesty's Guard to swear his Robin a yeoman.

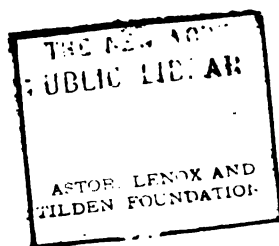
They passed from the gate-house through the larger courtyard to the small, inner one, from which a stair led down to the sparkling waters of the Thames, where the barges of gentlemen visiting Sir Walter were moored, the red coats of the bargemen adding colour to the lively scene. Much craft was passing to and fro on the river, and sounds of music and song floated on the bright frosty air. Robin, anxiously as his heart beat in suspense as to what the upshot would be of his father's interview with Sir Walter, found the time of waiting not too long, for all around was to him fresh and new, and filled him with wonder and interest.

He saw Master Harriott, the great mathematician and Sir Walter's intimate crony, who was writing the History of Virginia, come out from the porch of Durham House in converse with Richard Hakluyt, the collector of stories of travel, who had a huge roll of charts and manuscripts under his arm. They went



THE STEPS OF DURHAM HOUSE.





The Captain of the Guard

down the passage to the water-side and took barge together, and directly they were on board Master Hakluyt unfolded a chart, and the two studied it as they were rowed away.

And if Robin and his father could have looked into the garden on the east side of the house, they would have seen there pacing the walks in the January sunlight with slow meditative steps, a man of small stature and delicate features, Mr. Secretary Spenser, the "poet's poet," whose first three books of *The Faëry Queen*, which at the request of his friend, "The Shepherd of the Ocean," he had brought with him from Ireland, were then in the publisher's hands. Indeed, at that moment he was holding as he walked the proof close to his beautiful short-sighted eyes, and seeing for the first time how the antique world of romance which he had created, the "gentle knights pricking on the plain," his Gloriana, Britomart, dwarfs and dragons looked in print.

In the previous year, a small cloud, which was but a slight presage of a later storm, had arisen between Raleigh and the Queen, through the successful rivalry of the young Earl of Essex, who bluntly spoke of his fellow-favourite as "that knave Raleigh." The perpetual friction between the Captain of the Guard and the Master of the Horse, led to rumours of a forthcoming duel which the Queen forbade.

The Captain of the Guard

While the headstrong Earl, without the leave of his royal mistress, went off on an expedition to Portugal and distinguished himself by reckless gallantry, Raleigh had retired to spend the autumn on his Irish estate. His earlier acquaintance with the poet, belonging to his military career in "the isle of sorrow," had now ripened into a warm and romantic literary friendship, and it was Sir Walter's sound, critical judgment which had brought *The Faëry Queen* and its author to London. His insight told him that the wonderful allegory was the great awakening in English poetry for which men had been waiting in vain since Chaucer died, and with an eye to his own personal affairs also saw in it a means of making his present peace with

"Cynthia, the ladie of the sea,
Which from her presence faultless, him debarde."

Raleigh had prevailed on the poet to

"wend with him his Cynthia to see";

and his being received back into favour without more ado, seems to have been mainly due to his introducing at court one who immortalized her as Gloriana and Belphœbe, and so well caught the trick of flattery which the Queen's vanity and belief in her unfading corporeal charms had made the fashion of the time, that he likened her to

The Captain of the Guard

“a crown of lilies
Upon a virgin brydes adorned head,
With Roses dight and golden daffodillies new.
. . . . Or like fair Phebe's garland strung,
In which all pure perfection one may see.”

The Queen granted Spenser a pension of £50 a year, and only that morning at Durham House he had penned his dedication

“To
THE MOST HIGH, MIGHTIE AND MAGNIFICENT EMPRESS
ELIZABETH
RENOWNED FOR PIETY, VIRTUE, AND ALL
GRATIOUS GOVERNMENT.
QUEEN OF ENGLAND, FRANCE, IRELAND, AND OF VIRGINIA.
DEFENDER OF THE FAITH, ETC.,
HER HUMBLE SERVANT
EDMUND SPENSER
DOTH IN ALL HUMILITY
DEDICATE, PRESENT AND CONSECRATE
THESE HIS LABOURS
TO LIVE WITH THE ETERNITY OF HER FAME.”

This dedication, on a loose sheet of paper, lay on a writing-table in the spacious apartment where at last Esquire Fane was shown by a page. Robin stood behind in the hall, the lofty roof of which was

The Captain of the Guard

supported by marble pillars, awaiting a signal from his father. Sir Walter was attired in his silver armour, marvellously wrought, for in a few minutes he was going on duty as Captain of the Guard at Whitehall. He thought he remembered the name of Fane on the roll of those Virginian colonists who had been brought home by Captain Whyte, after a second attempt at colonizing, and a long struggle against disease and starvation that led to the abandoning for twenty years of the unfortunate colony on which he had spent £40,000. But no failure daunted the unquenchable spirit of enterprise in Raleigh, and he still cherished the ambition of firmly planting the Queen's Empire beyond the sea, and opening out vast sources of wealth. An hour before he had been absorbed in tracing a route to Guiana on a map, with the help of Harriott and Hakluyt, and discussing an expedition thither. The golden vision of Manoa, the El Dorado of Spanish romance, was ever floating before those keen eyes which saw so much that was not visionary. They measured now with approval Christopher Fane's muscular, well-knit figure, which exceeded in height his own by more than an inch.

But when the Esquire said what he had to say, which did not take long, he being of direct and simple speech, Raleigh shook his head and answered—

The Captain of the Guard

"Nay, sir, you have been ill-advised to lodge this request, for I will not have boys in the Guard. Now if 'twas yourself methinks you would make a proper yeoman."

"Prithee, see my boy ere you decide, sir."

"I will, but 'tis useless."

Christopher went to the door and called Robin. He came swift as a hound to the whistle, and father and son stood side by side.

"'Sdeath!" exclaimed the Captain of the Guard, looking at the fair-haired young Hercules in admiration. "This is no lanky, weedy, overgrown stripling. 'Tis a pleasure to see so fine a shoot of a handsome tree. I'll swear your boy, sir, and take him with me at once to Whitehall, where he shall carry up Her Majesty's first dish at dinner, and I warrant that he'll well please her eyes."

Robin had not been prepared for such sudden good fortune. In the event of his being accepted for the Guard he had anticipated one day at least before entering on his duties: a day to be spent in going with his father after dining at an ordinary in Holborn, to saunter in the crowded nave of Paul's, or perhaps to see a play in Blackfriars, and afterwards to take barge on that sparkling, busy Father Thames to Richmond, where Iris had been living for some months past in the household of Sir George and Lady Bulkeley.

The Captain of the Guard

Since their separation Robin had dreamed day and night of this meeting with Iris. It had only needed absence to reveal to him, boy though he still was, that he would not always be content for Iris to be simply only his foster-sister and comrade. Did he guess that the same thought had passed through the mind of his elder brothers when the Yuletide before the Armada they were all gathered together once more at the Manor, and saw how the sweet flower of Iris's maidenhood was unfolding. Each of the three elders knew what was in the heart of the other—that the love they cherished there was beginning to be not love of brothers for a sister.

One evening when they had been sitting round the hearth roasting chestnuts in the ashes for old sake's sake, Frank as usual the most talkative and making more out of his single voyage than the other two had ever done of their now numerous exploits and ventures over sea, it was almost on the tip of Kit's tongue to interrupt Frank's chatter with the proposal that they should draw lots for the right of wooing Iris.

Then he had looked round and seen Robin and Iris together in a distant alcove, after a long day's fox-hunting with the Esquire's hounds in the intoxicating Dartmoor air. The girl had slipped from the settle, fast asleep, with her head resting on Robin's

The Captain of the Guard

knees. The boy was wide awake, and his active limbs must have tingled to stretch themselves, but he kept them in a cramped position heroically for fear of disturbing the dark head. And seeing them thus together, Robin was absolved as far as Kit was concerned from the blame his brethren had been inclined to lay on him for Iris's accident and sojourn at the Mount, the news of which had filled them with such angry dismay, that on their first coming home one and all would have challenged Gervase Vidal to fight them in single combat had not Iris reminded them that if they loved her at all they should be grateful rather than angry, for Gervase had saved her life. So Kit snatched a chestnut from the embers and held his peace, recalling the old compact he had tacitly entered into with the other two long ago that Iris was to be a sister to all of them, but something perchance more special to Robin.

And then the summer had come and the proud Spanish fleet; and while its battered galleons were being chased to their final doom in the North Sea by a storm more fierce and prolonged than the one which had cast Iris into the lives of the four brothers, the eldest, who had been most able of them all to comfort and soothe her in her childish passions, who had carried her about on his shoulder and taught her to fly his hawks, and had brought her an emerald in a

The Captain of the Guard

sweet-smelling cedar-wood box, and a fan made of feathers from his second voyage, died, with the name he had given her on his lips and the love which was more than brother's love unspoken in his heart.

There were only three Fanes now, and two of them were far away again on the ocean wave, and with Robin sworn to arms and Iris at Richmond learning from Mrs. Het and Cis Bulkeley how to wear a ruff and farthingale and other garments and accessories of a fashionable Elizabethan toilette, the Esquire would find his nest bereft indeed when he rode back into Devon.

XVIII

A DAY AT COURT

ROBIN thought he must be dreaming when at a few minutes' notice he found himself plunged into the very heart of the bewildering splendours of the Court at Whitehall.

He never forgot the carrying up of that first dish.

Before he was permitted to touch it, he witnessed a ceremonial which might well fill a country youth with astonishment.

In the banqueting-hall, ringing with the sound of kettledrums and trumpets, the yeomen of the Guard, clad in scarlet with a golden rose on their backs, brought in twenty-four dishes in a service of gilt plate, which were set down before two ladies in white silk armed with tasting-knives, who first prostrated themselves before the table and then rubbed the plates with bread and salt, after which they gave a mouthful from each dish to the Guard as a protection against poison. The Queen came attended by her gentlemen-pensioners, her lords, and ladies-in-waiting to the inner and more private chamber where she dined with

A Day at Court

only a small company, and here the courses were carried for her to select from, and her choice being made, the rest were taken to the tables of her ladies and maids-of-honour in the hall.

Robin, as he put down his dish before the Queen, was at first too awed to raise his eyes to her face ; but he saw ten long white fingers sparkling with gems, from which she drew her perfumed, embroidered gloves with elaborate gesture, her hands being a part of her queenly person of which she was particularly vain.

As Sir Walter had foretold, the Queen gazed with delight on the sinewy young giant with his blue eyes and yellow curls, who might have stalked from the Walhalla of the Saxon gods into her presence.

She made use of her favourite exclamation, and turning to the Captain of the Guard commented on the good looks of his new yeoman with an emphasis that made Robin blush, and cast down his eyes the more.

Before his duties for the day, however, were over, and he was off guard, he had been able to steal so many glances at the majestic countenance that the high, pale forehead surmounted by a red wig and pearl head-dress, the hawk-like eyes, aquiline nose and sharp chin, sunk in the huge ruff, seemed to have become almost familiar. Robin, boy-like, found

A Day at Court

the beauty of some of Her Majesty's maids-of-honour far more dazzling to his sight than her own. It was strange that the Queen should expect these fair, high-bred young creatures, most of them in the bloom of their *première jeunesse*, to follow her example and wither on the virgin stem in single blessedness. Nothing enraged her more than that they should dare to marry, and she constantly lectured them on avoiding the snares of love and matrimony.

“Hey down, a down, did Dian sing
Amongst her virgins sitting;
Than love there is no vainer thing,
For maidens most unfitting”—

rhymed one of her courtiers, apropos of this mania so characteristic of the small side of the great Queen's nature.

“Why hath not Mrs. Throgmorton brought the cup of grace?” the Queen demanded, puckering her brows into a sudden angry frown—she had made a very frugal meal, despite the gorgeous ceremony with which it had been served.

The note of irritation in the royal voice reached the dining-table in the hall. Mrs. Throgmorton rose hurriedly, and bearing the cup between her jewelled hands, came into the privy chamber. Of the bevy of fair maids surrounding the Queen, several of whom bore her name, this Mrs. Elizabeth Throgmorton was

A Day at Court

perhaps to be accorded the palm for loveliness. Her hair was brown with red lights in it, her eyes soft and large as a fawn's. She was very tall, but carried her height with a supreme grace, the poise of her small head and slender neck reminding one of a lily on its stem.

In a charming attitude of humility, Mrs. Throgmorton kneeled to the Queen, murmuring an apology as she handed her the chased silver cup.

"Yesterday you were late, to-day you are later. 'Tis to be hoped, Mrs. Throgmorton, that you are not on the way to become as negligent of your duties as the Lady Mary Howard hath been. But nay," the Queen added in a gentler tone, seeing Mrs. Throgmorton hang down her head under her rebuke, "you are not like to emulate so ungracious and flouting a wench as that."

Sir Walter Raleigh's eyes had been fixed admiringly on the kneeling figure of the maid-of-honour, but he quickly averted them as the Queen turned, and with her most brilliant smile, showing a row of discoloured teeth, gave the grace-cup to her Captain of the Guard. He drank from the spot which Her Majesty's lips had touched with some extravagantly ornate speech about the Nectar which Hebe brought unto Venus being rendered doubly sweet by Venus's sacred mouth partaking thereof; but he was too guarded to watch

A Day at Court

Hebe as he fain would have done while she retreated with slow and stately steps into the banqueting-hall.

Sir Walter knew that the head and front of Lady Mary Howard's offending, and the reason the Queen had spoken of her so hardly as "a flouting wench," was that her beauty had attracted too much notice from the Earl of Essex, with whom she had been bold enough to engage in conversation, which did "breed great choler in her mistress." He saw the wisdom of not putting Elizabeth Throgmorton in the same position. The recalcitrant Earl was in disgrace again, after being forgiven for his escapades at Lisbon, for he had just consoled the widow of Sir Philip Sidney after seven years' mourning, by marrying her in secret. Thus it happened when Robin entered on his duties at Court in Her Majesty's Guard, that his Captain was for the present enjoying the full measure of Elizabeth's renewed favours, without others to share them. Leicester had died, his once fine person grown bloated and portly, soon after the Armada, and Sir Christopher Hatton, otherwise "Mutton" and "Lids" (ridiculous pet-names his Queen had bestowed on him), was now past dancing galliards, and broken-hearted, was sickening for the illness which proved fatal a year later. The most abject of all Elizabeth's

A Day at Court

platonic lovers, he showed himself the most faithful by dying a bachelor.

Even the veteran Lord Treasurer Burleigh had found himself balked in the Council Chamber by the Queen's infatuation for the youthful Essex, thirty-three years her junior, who had been his ward, and alluded to him disrespectfully as the "Old Fox." Other handsome young gallants such as Cumberland, Blount and Mountjoy, had been brought into the lists to delight the fastidious eye of Her Majesty with their athletic grace and beauty of limb in jousts and tiltings, but none occupied the same place in her fond affections as the Earl of Essex. When she sent him to Coventry, she became irritable and moody and impatient to recall him immediately. Though they played primero together till "the birds sang in the morning," and Elizabeth would allow the young favourite to kneel by the hour together before her, pleading for leave, like a spoilt child for a toy, to go on a foreign campaign, there were constant flare-ups between them. Essex was too full of the hot blood of generous youth and the spirit of restless chivalry to put himself in silken leading-strings, with the diplomatic submission of Hatton and Raleigh. He jibbed and shied like a sensitive thoroughbred, and ran away or came down on his knees in more senses than one.

A Day at Court

Mrs. Throgmorton attributed her scolding from the Queen for unpunctuality in bringing the grace-cup indirectly to the Earl's secret marriage.

After dinner, when Her Majesty had watched from the outside gallery a game of ballon, played by the ladies and gentlemen of the Court on the frost-spangled grass-plot of the privy garden, she retired to her private closet to ply her needle in embroidering a scarf for the Huguenot King of France, and to translate a passage from Seneca. Raleigh, accompanied by a detachment of the Guard, returned to Durham House. As in the morning so now his courtyard and hall and antechamber were crowded with gentlemen adventurers, sea-captains, merchants and scriveners, waiting to have speech with him. He despatched them all and some correspondence before he doffed his silver armour, and arrayed himself again for Court in a white satin doublet wrought with seed pearls, and a chain of pearls as big as acorns hanging about his neck. His garter-knots and short ermine cloak were lined with cerulean blue which matched the bunch of plumes in his high-crowned hat. Beside this resplendent bravery, the ash-grey velvet suit of his "Colin Clout" looked somewhat sad and sober as he and Spenser stepped together from the stairs on to Sir Walter's private barge with its cloth of silver hangings and gilded prow.

A Day at Court

They passed from the water-gate of Durham House and floated up to Whitehall beneath the star-lit, frosty sky. The twinkling lights of a thousand wherries and barges moved like fire-flies on the dark rippling surface of the river, and from the bank came the flare of torches as servants lighted their masters and mistresses to the stairs from that line of lordly pleasure houses on the Strand, the pleasant gardens of which then stretched down to the water-side.

Once more Robin was on guard between the privy dining-chamber and the banqueting-hall. Once more he saw the gentlemen with rods lay the snowy cloths on the long tables, the gold trenchers set out and the dishes brought in, with extraordinary and innumerable genuflexions. Now myriads of wax-lights from the branching candelabra shed their soft radiance on the decanters of hippocras, and the Rhenish wines sparkling like rubies and topazes ; on devices of greenery ; pyramids of fruits and comfits and elaborately-wrought confections which did credit to the genius of Her Majesty's Sergeant of the Pastries. It was all like fairyland to Robin ; the vistas of beautiful rooms with their many windows and painted ceilings, the long galleries with their statuary, and massive cabinets and tapestry hangings worked in silver and gold. Above all, the fair maids-of-honour, whose eyes and jewels seemed to shine brighter by

A Day at Court

candle-light, and who wore more brilliant-hued kirtles and richer brocades than they had swept earlier in the day over the rush and herb-strewn floors.

The Queen supped as frugally as she had dined, off broth and a manchet, and drank no wine. During the meal her musicians played airs in the music gallery, and after it was over struck up a lively galliard. Then there was dancing. The quick-paced galliard was succeeded by the pavan, a grave and stately measure in common time, so called because it was supposed to resemble the motions of the proud majestic peacock. The Queen, seated on a dais above the dancers, beat time now and again with her foot, contemplating the ankle in a violet silk stocking that she had once displayed with pride to the French Ambassador at a council meeting. Next to her hands the Queen of England was vainest of her ankles. One after the other, those of the courtiers present who were assured enough of pleasing their mistress by their handsome looks and gallant manners, earnestly besought her to dance, as if their salvation depended on her consenting.

If she who was Terpsichore incarnate would not join in it, the dance must be deprived indeed of all its beauty and grace. Was not Her Majesty's dancing the poetry of motion, her feet like twinkling stars, so

A Day at Court

light that the daisy did not bend beneath them? So spake Ralegh.

But the Queen would not dance. Perhaps her heart was too sore in thinking of the absent Earl, who, had he been there, would not have tried to persuade her in vain.

In the wild mazes of the "brawls" that followed, Sir Walter could hardly have found it devoid of grace and beauty, when it came to his turn in the dance to take Mrs. Throgmorton for a moment by the waist, and meet her soft brown eyes which faltered before his bold and passionate glance.

After the exciting brawl, trophies lay about the floor in the shape of fragments from the ladies' dresses, studs, bugles, pieces of lace and fringe. Mrs. Throgmorton missed from her bosom a velvet riband-knot of roseate hue, but it was not on the floor; for Sir Walter unobserved had picked it up and hidden it beneath his doublet. Fortunate for him that no fraction of it was visible between the white satin folds as the Queen called him to her side and asked, "Where is thy friend Master Edmund Spenser? Was he not to read to us to-night more of his *Faëry Queen*?"

"He hath brought some of the sheets in his pouch, Madam, and the dedication that he hath writ to your gracious Majesty. The wondrous poem is now in the press, and in a short time the world will possess it

A Day at Court

and know in what imperishable verse the beauty and virtues of its most illustrious sovereign have been enshrined."

"Bring him hither, and then set thy pipe alight, for it pleaseth me to watch the wreaths and rings of smoke whilst the poet reads."

Raleigh went in search of Spenser, and found him in the retired embrasure of a window looking on the tilt-yard, which was illumined by the silvery moon-light.

"Why, Colin, dost hold aloof from the revels? Methought you had tuned your oaten reed too often in a waste of solitude," Raleigh said, looking down affectionately on the face that scarcely reached his shoulder when Spenser stood at his full height.

"I know not why, but the music and dancing produced in me melancholy musings," was Spenser's reply, "and my thoughts have been dwelling on the vanished lights in this quiet corner; on Astrophel, the glory of his times, who first uplifted my Muse to sing of sweet delights; on Leicester, he who sat in the bosom of his Sovereign when last I came to Court, and was held in such high count and honour. Alack how doleful was his death, with scarce any left to close his eyes, or say a requiem over his grave!"

"Come, Colin, this will not do. 'Tis the unextinguished lights that demand thy poetical homage here

A Day at Court

at Court. Cynthia is waiting all impatience to hear more of thy 'happy land of Faëry,' " Raleigh answered, taking the poet by the arm and drawing him along the gallery.

"What portion shall I read to-night?"

"The 'lovely lay' which meets the Knight of Temperance when he doth draw near Acrasia's bower, and what follows. Methinks thou hast not matched that for melody elsewhere."

But in advising Spenser to read the passage which his own discernment knew to be exquisite music, Raleigh made a mistake. The Queen was greedy to hear more of Gloriana, the Empress of all Nobleness, and Belphœbe, the Princess of all that was sweet and beautiful; of Britomart, the armed vestal of pure chastity, and of Mercilla, the compassionate and gentle, for it was only herself in the poem, not the poem, that delighted her. She accepted the dedication literally, and believed that its claim to live was through its glorification of her fame.

Elizabeth saw in the great literature then springing up, of which she was the supposed inspiration, nothing but a monument of that gross flattery for which her appetite was insatiable, and to which all the men of light and leading in the country shamelessly pandered.

With her maids-of-honour standing behind her chair, her courtiers grouped around her, and the soft

A Day at Court

wreaths and rings of smoke from Raleigh's silver-bowled pipe floating upwards into the groined roof, Spenser read aloud the "lovely lay" of temptation, and description of Acrasia's bower of Bliss, which as a picture of pleasure's voluptuous allurements has perhaps never been rivalled; and then he passed to another passage, in which the same theme, the beauty of the rose, is used in this case to illustrate stainless purity.

"That daintie Rose, the daughter of her Morne,
More dear than life she tendered, whose flowers
The girlond of her honour did adorne ;
Ne suffered she the mid-day's scorching power
Ne the sharp Northern wind thereon to shower,
But lapped up her silken leaves most chayre,
When so the froward sky began to lowre.
But, soon as calmed was the chrystall air,
She did it fair dispose and let it flourish fair.

"Eternal God, in his almighty power,
To make ensample of his heavenly grace,
In Paradise whylom did plant this flower,
Whence he it fetcht out of her native place
And did in stocke of earthly flesh enrace,
That mortal men her glory should admire
In gentle Ladies breste and bounteous race
Of woman kind it fayrest Flower doth spye,
And beareth fruit of honours and all chaste desire.

"Fayre ympes of beautie, whose bright shining beams
Adorne the world with like to heavenly light,
And to your willes both royalties and reames
Subdew through conquest of your wondrous might

A Day at Court

With this fair flower your goodly girlonds dight
Of chastity and vertue virginnall,
That shall embellish more your beauty bright
And crowne your heades with heavenly coronall,
Such as the angels wear before God's tribunall."

The melody flowed on in the regular soronous cadences of the poet's voice, and the Queen yawned.

At first she had listened with eager attention, but as no mention came of Gloriana or Belphebe or Britomart, her interest waned. She was bored, and allowed the fatigues of the day to show greyly on her face. Her chin sank deeper into her ruff, and her alert eyes were almost hidden beneath her drooping lids.

But Spenser, if he had not pleased the Queen, had enchanted other ears. None more than those of the youthful yeoman of the Guard, who had entered on so new a life that day, and who stood at his post by the arras, shouldering his heavy halberd, with wide blue eyes too charmed and excited to be weary.

Like his brothers, he knew and loved few books. The Bible, *Amadis of Gaul*, *Cruelties of Spain*, Turberville's *Book of Falconrie*, and *Sir Thomas Malory*, was all the library of the Fanes contained. Wonderful then was this glimpse into the charmed world of poesie, "the land of faëry," shown by the magician, the wand of whose genius had brought it into being; most wonderful perhaps of all the fresh experiences

A Day at Court

which the boy new from the country reviewed that night when he laid himself down to sleep. In one day Robin had seen the Queen's brightest smile and her blackest frown, had heard her swear, spout Latin and parry euphuisms with her courtiers. So he may be forgiven if that night for once the Queen of the realm figured more prominently in his dreams than did Iris the Queen of his heart.

XIX

ROBIN HEARS TOO MUCH

A FEW days later Robin Fane was brought before Raleigh by the lieutenant, not for neglecting but exceeding his duties.

It had happened that while he was on guard at the end of one of the long galleries, a group of gentlemen, gathered in a window near, fell to talking of the Captain of the Guard in the uncomplimentary fashion which was customary behind his back.

"The Court is under Water again now my Lord of Essex hath gone to the wars in France," said a gorgeous person in rose-pink with a pointed beard dyed crimson.

"'Tis a very Swamp," remarked another in sky-blue and silver lacings toying with a pomander.

"Methinks we shall die of an ague," added a third in orange velvet, "unless my young lord hastens home, and doth set us all in a combustion."

"Did'st not expect to see the indignant shade of 'Mutton' appear when Her Majesty led the brawls with him yester-night?"

Robin hears too much

"And he hath begun his begging tricks again. He was petitioning in the Presence Chamber all this forenoon."

"In troth, there is naught left for him to ask for. He hath acquired all the fattest emoluments. Never was there such a rich beggar withal."

"But he yet greedily covets the lands of my Lord Bishop Sarum at Sherbourne."

"And he hath gotten a pension of fifty pounds for his friend the poet."

"'What, all that for a song!' the Lord Treasurer hath exclaimed, when 'twas screwed out of him."

"Well-a-day! Jumping Jack hath risen to the top of the tree again, and there he will stay till my Lord of Essex comes back to bring him down."

"And who and what was he ere he grew so pert in his Sovereign's favour? The base-born son of a Devonshire farmer."

It was at this point that the new yeoman leaped forward into the midst of the trio, shaking his halberd excitedly like some young Norse giant ready to kill.

"You call him base-born," cried Robin. "Base-born forsooth! he who hath kinship with Champenowns, Grenvilles, Gilberts and Careys and all the best blood in Devon? Methinks you are very ignorant of the great personage you are tearing to pieces."

Robin hears too much

If a figure in the tapestry on the opposite wall had descended and interfered thus brusquely in their converse, the three gentlemen could not have been more astounded. The gentleman in the rose-pink was the first to recover and find his tongue.

"This saucy lout has surely taken leave of his senses, thus to forget his place."

"He hath dared to make use of his sense of hearing," said the gentleman in orange velvet. But the gentleman in blue held his pomander nervously to his nose in extreme trepidation at the flushed young guardsman's threatening air, and said he must instantly be handed over to his superior officer for reprimand.

Thus, Robin, after an hour's solitary confinement in the guard-room, came to be standing in an attitude of contrition before the Captain of the Guard, whom he had so rashly championed.

"Those who serve in Her Majesty's bodyguard are required to be vigilant only in what concerns the safety and well-being of her person," Raleigh said; "in other matters their eyes must be as if they saw not and their ears as if they heard not."

"Sir, I know . . . but 'twas of you they spoke, and when one lied somehow I could no longer hold my peace, because I knew—knew that you—" The boy blushed and halted.

Robin hears too much

"'Tis thy first fault, therefore thou shalt not be punished further, but remember that had it been thy second fault, and 'twas on behalf of me and truth you erred, thy punishment would not have been lightened on that account."

Then, as Robin remained silent, he went on—

"I will not ask what 'twas you heard that so shocked you. Mayhap I could guess if I tried. As the custom of Courts and the manners of courtiers become less novel to you, you will be more wonted to hear my name misused by idle gossipers.

"For whoso reaps renown above the rest,
With heaps of hate shall surely be oppressed."

"Those lines, boy, were writ by me in the preface to Master Gascoigne's *Steele Glass*, a dozen years and more ago, and I have since tested their truth by my own experience. They spoke belike of my School of Atheism, and of spelling Dog backwards."

"Nay—there was one in a pink silk doublet with a beard nigh matching, who——"

"Say no more—I said that I would not ask. But methinks I recall him of the pink silk and bizarre-hued beard such as you describe, stooping to wipe the snow from my shoes one day in the privy garden in sight of Her Majesty. They can cringe to me in her presence. Double-faced curs that they are, yet

Robin hears too much

I have my true friends, and amongst my faithful servants I may count on thee?"

"Oh, sir, now and for ever. In good and evil hap I would wish for no prouder lot than to serve you."

He lifted his frank childish blue eyes from the floor, and tossed back his yellow curls as he spoke, the enthusiasm of the hero-worshipper bringing the blood hotly to his clear, sunburnt cheek.

He was dismissed with a smile, and the very next morning commissioned to do his Captain a private service, which mark of confidence filled him with great joy.

XX

A SECRET SERVICE

ROBIN felt instinctively, though no one told him, that he was privileged when he received a summons to his Captain's study high up in the Tower of Durham House. His windows looked up and down the Thames, "a prospect which is as pleasant as any in the world," wrote old Aubrey, "which not only refreshes the eyesight but cheers the spirit, and I believe enlarges an ingeniose man's thoughts."

To this sanctum came only a few of Sir Walter's most cherished literary friends, such as Master Harriott, Edmund Spenser, and may be the brilliant youth wild Kit Marlow, and other nimble wits of the "Mermaid," a coterie whose famous tavern meetings the busy Raleigh found time to grace with his presence and adorn with his humour.

His study in the tower was full of charts and maps and all kinds of books, from the choicest classics to those volumes of Spanish travels telling stories of discovery and exploration, which he picked up where-

A Secret Service

ever he could lay hands on them. Pictures of the scenery of Florida, painted by Jacques de Morgues, a French artist, hung on the walls, and amongst his treasures was the manuscript of Estavao de Gama's voyage to the Red Sea in 1641.

He was writing when Robin came into the room, which was illumined by the winter sunlight; and his quill continued to scratch vigorously for some minutes after he had glanced up and nodded. Robin looked from the window at the dark boats and wherries and the barges with their gay hangings and streamers, and wondered how long it took to go to Richmond by water, and how long it would be before he saw Iris. Beyond the steeples and gables on the other side of the river were fields and stretches of frozen marsh, and the Surrey hills, powdered with snow, rose faintly against a misty blue sky.

"I know a neighbour of yours in Devon," Raleigh said, when he had sealed his letter, "who chooses also a watch-tower in the sky for study. Only his overlooks the heather and the sea instead of this mighty fair river."

"'Tis Master Vidal of the Mount, of whom you speak, sir. Ay, he overlooks the sea, but hates it," Robin answered with more vehemence than was necessary.

"Methought the prejudice against that gentleman

A Secret Service

would have died when he came forth from his solitude, like so many others of the Catholic gentry, to command a company of militia, which he brought to the muster at Tilbury at the great crisis of this country's preservation from Spanish invasion."

Robin looked ashamed for he knew that in spite of that unexpected and patriotic action on Gervase's part, which had taken every one by surprise, he still nurtured the old prejudice. He remembered indeed to have been almost sorry rather than glad when in the spring of the Armada year it was reported that a Justice of the Peace had gone to the Mount not to fine its owner for recusancy, but to deliver into his hands a warrant from Sir Walter Raleigh to raise a levy for the defence of the country. That he had not refused to perform the office imposed on him, but had instead conquered for the nonce his repugnance to mixing with his fellow-men and come out in martial array to drill his tenants every day, had made all South Devon rub its eyes. Iris had exclaimed triumphantly, "Did I not say it would be so? I was sure that when it came to the point he would not be backward to serve his Queen and country!" No one had guessed that Iris knew why Gervase Vidal had bestirred himself and shown such unusual energy at the moment of national danger.

"But when the fight was over," said Robin, "and

A Secret Service

there was no more fear of a landing, the Spanish bloodhounds being chased from off the face of the ocean, he came back and hath lived his old life again. He held aloof from the joyous feasting and junketing. The Mount roasted no ox, and did kindle no beacon-fire."

"Ah, I see that thou, at any rate, still bearest a grudge against Master Vidal." Sir Walter laughed. "Thou art a good hater, as well as being faithful in love and service. Eh?"

Then he took a small packet from the table.

"See. I am going to put your promised faithfulness to the test, and entrust you with this. At the hour of Her Majesty going to prayer in the chapel to-morrow, when the covers are laid for breakfast, you will be stationed at the little door at the foot of the stairway down which passes, ere the Queen cometh, Mrs. Throgmorton her maid-of-honour, bearing her mantle. Find occasion to give her the packet unseen, saying 'tis from Sir Walter Raleigh in exchange for certain property of hers which she dropped during the brawls t'other night, and which he hath appropriated. Say, too, that a diamond which cometh unexpectedly bringeth fair luck."

With the precious packet in his hand, Robin drank in his instructions, too eager to fulfil them when the time came to notice how at variance they

A Secret Service

were with Sir Walter's reminder of the day before about yeomen's unseeing eyes and unhearing ears.

The morning was grey and bitterly cold, but the yeomen of the Guard, as they moved to and fro bringing the breakfast-covers, seemed to warm the air with their blaze of scarlet and gold. Robin, after taking his share in the ceremony was, as Sir Walter said, told off to stand guard at the foot of the little stairway.

Between his hand and his halberd was clasped the small packet, and so keenly on the alert was his sense of hearing at that moment, that he almost mistook the beating of his heart for the footfall for which he was listening.

At last she came, looking fair and lovely as when he had seen her bear the cup of grace on his first day at Court, although a little paler from the cold. Elizabeth Throgmorton descended the steps with a swiftness which is the acme of grace in a graceful woman and bustle in an ungraceful one. The fur of the mantle she carried touched his arm ; she would have passed in another moment had not Robin, without turning his head to the right or to the left and his lips hardly moving, whispered clearly—

“Sir Walter Raleigh bid me give you this.”

The lady paused, and suddenly ceased to look pale and cold. A radiant glow spread from her uncovered

A Secret Service

neck to her brow, as she repeated softly, "Sir Walter Raleigh," and held out her hand.

While Robin gave the rest of the message she slipped the packet into the bag that hung from her girdle.

"Give him thanks," she breathed, and glided away.

A few minutes afterwards the Queen, going to morning prayers, came with her procession of attendants through the gallery. The fur mantle was on her shoulders and Mrs. Throgmorton's pale cheeks were still aglow.

XXI

AT RICHMOND

THE Queen had spent Christmas at Windsor and, after some vacillation between Greenwich and Oatlands, the Court was ordered to Richmond at Easter.

The sight of the royal flag flying from the Gothic clock-tower of the old palace was apt to agitate the soul of good Lady Bulkeley, and send her off on a tour of inspection through larder and store-rooms. She knew too well the Queen's habit of inviting herself to breakfast, dine or sup at the houses in the neighbourhood at very brief notice, not to be prepared. Sometimes indeed Her Majesty gave no notice at all ; for once, when she had been chasing a stag in those charming sylvan glades (where her sire had also delighted to hunt) a gentleman-usher had ridden through Sir George Bulkeley's gates, bringing word that the Queen's grace was without and hungry, and would be pleased to partake of the family dinner.

At Richmond

Ever since, as soon as the flag was hoisted and it was known that the Court had come to Richmond, the *châtelaine* of the pleasant hunting-lodge on the outskirts of the park, looking on the river and away to the woodlands and blue hills of Surrey, saw to the basting of chines of beef and haunches of mutton, and to the plucking of capons and guinea-fowls for pasties, in readiness for the chance incursion of a hungry Queen.

Lady Bulkeley's Hetty and Cis were still unmatched, and the various gentlemen who brought their sons at her ladyship's invitation from time to time to inspect the pair of damsels very much as if they were two pieces of furniture for sale, had of late gone away quickly, because the sons, directly they saw Iris, fell in love with her eyes, and became blind to the charms of Het and Cis.

Iris had an unconscious witchery about her which would have made her a dangerous rival to the girls of the house, had they not been too good-natured to be jealous. They were placid and easy-going, and not nearly so anxious to be married as their mother was to marry them.

"'Tis well we should stay as we are," Hetty said one day, "for when she has gotten us husbands, mother will so miss the occupation of looking out for them, that I don't know what she'll do."

At Richmond

"She will sit and sigh for more daughters to marry, as Alexander the Great did for more worlds to conquer," answered Cis.

That was before Iris came. Afterwards Het remarked—

"It surpriseth me much that mother wished to bring her into our household. For how can she expect any one to look at us while Iris is at hand?"

"Iris is not for sale," laughed Cis. "Esquire Fane could not afford to dower her handsomely, and it's not known what quarterings her ancestors had, or who they were. So she hath no pedigree, forsooth."

"Belike she will end by wedding with one of her foster-brothers, which I would liefer she did than wed with that gloomy kinsman of ours, Master Vidal. I declare I shiver when I think of him, in his great cheerless, haunted house, and his cats and dogs and vermin withal."

"Iris should wed with some beauteous prince out of a fairy tale," said Cis. "Here she comes. Look at her. Is she not a princess?"

Iris stood in the doorway, the sun pouring through a lattice behind her, making a background of golden light to her erect and supple young figure. Her hair was now swept upwards to the crown of her head under a coif of velvet, to make room for the spreading

At Richmond

transparent ruff round her neck. A veil floated from the coif behind lower than her waist, which was defined by the closely-fitting silken gown of the same mauve hue as the flower whose name she bore. Though stiffened by a moderate farthingale, it trailed in soft folds about her feet. Her jupon was of primrose satin, embroidered with a trellis of silver braid, and at her girdle hung the fan of feathers with the little metal mirror in its centre, which poor Kit had brought her from the Indies.

In this array Robin had beheld her the first time he had got leave to come to Sir George Bulkeley's house at Richmond, and he had wondered for a moment if he should ever find his old playmate of simple kerchief and kirtle again beneath all this bravery of silk, satin, and lace—and Iris on her side put her hands before her eyes and vowed that Robin was too dazzling to be looked at in his gorgeous tunic of scarlet and gold. Then they had both laughed.

"Thou art so grown," said Robin; "thou art near as tall as Mrs. Throgmorton."

"And who may Mrs. Throgmorton be?"

"The tallest and fairest of the Queen's maids."

"And so the tallest and youngest of the Queen's bodyguard holds that he may aspire to fall in love with her?"

At Richmond

"Nay, that would be too aspiring in truth, when there's the Captain of the Guard himself who loves her. But remember 'tis a secret that must not be breathed even to the trees," Robin added in some anxiety.

"But your Captain Raleigh is the Queen's lover methought."

"One may be the Queen's lover and yet have other loves," said Robin, with the worldly wisdom he had acquired during his short service about the Court. "My Lord of Essex is the Queen's lover, but for all that hath lately married. My Lord of Southampton hath done likewise. As for my Lord of Leicester, they say he was twice married, yet swore to his dying day that he loved only the Queen."

"If I were Mrs. Throgmorton," Iris said, "and Sir Walter were my lover and he beloved by me, I should methinks not be well pleased to see him ever dangling in the company of another, and hear him making vows of love in another's ear."

"But when 'another' is the Queen, 'tis different," Robin maintained.

"'Tis pitiful that Her Majesty should be so bolstered up in the delusion that age cannot wither her. She would be none the less beloved by loyal folk if she acknowledged herself an old woman."

Robin was aghast at this speech of Iris's, for he had

At Richmond

heard no one at Court dare to speak openly of the Queen in connection with that old age she so dreaded, which she fought tooth and nail, and held at bay with the weapons of her courtiers' gross flattery, and her own stupendous vanity and self-deception.

Then Iris sat down to the virginals. Robin must hear, she said, how she had profited by the instructions of the master of music, who came to give her and Mrs. Hetty and Cis lessons twice a week.

She opened a thick quarto music-book bound in calf with the Bulkeley arms emblazoned on it, and proceeded to play from it on the small yellow keys several airs and "fancies," ending with the march of bagpipes and drums. Robin watched the lithe fingers, and thought it a wonderful performance.

"There!" she said, when she had finished, making him a curtsy, "am I not accomplished enough now to satisfy poor old Doll Saunders who always grumbled at my being brought up like a boy? Dost thou not think I should shine at Court if I came thither, perhaps to be next tallest if not next fairest to Mrs. Throgmorton of Her Majesty's maids?"

Her words spoken in merry jest proved prophetic.

The Court coming to Richmond that Eastertide, brought another change in the girl's life.

A mist of young April green was on the trees, and the thrushes and blackbirds were singing, when Queen

At Richmond

Elizabeth and her retinue passed down one of the noble avenues of the park from the old palace of Sheen, which her grandfather Henry VII. had called Richmond, after his Earldom in Yorkshire.

The Queen came to beguile a few hours by watching a mask improvised for her entertainment by her worthy ranger Sir George Bulkeley and his lady, in their grounds, which sloped down by a winding path and marble steps to the river-bank.

The strain on the resources of a household of entertaining Her Majesty, severe as it might be, was after all not willingly to be foregone by Lady Bulkeley. After a fortnight had gone by and the Queen had neither paid a surprise visit nor warned her of her coming, the lady began to fear she might leave Richmond without doing so, and had prevailed on her husband to solicit humbly the honour of her presence that afternoon, to witness a mask of Diana the Huntress.

The Queen's appetite for this sort of diversion must have been insatiable, for since the famous princely pageants at Kenilworth, nearly twenty years before, countless displays that tried to rival them had met her eye on her progresses. One wonders that she did not weary of the mechanical part at least of these

"Italian masks by night,
Sweet speeches, comedies, and pleasing shows";

At Richmond

the paste-board castles and fortresses, sham ships and mythological monsters, floating in artificial waters, and fireworks.

The entertainment provided for the delighting of her senses to-day was without such elaborate scenery, and, with one unique feature, was the usual medley of nymphs and satyrs, tags of classic legend, lame verse, music and songs.

How often had the Queen been received by the daughters of her host in the garden-path between the gate and the porch in the guise of Hours or Graces, and presented with nosegays and tedious rhymed addresses? Each one of the eight elder sisters of Hetty and Cis had performed this *role* at some time in their lives. None had ever done it worse than Het, who stumbled over her doggerel lines, and whose bare arms and hands emerged as stiff as toasting-forks and reddened by the easterly breeze from her diaphanous draperies.

But the Queen listened in patience to the end of the oration, and chucked her under the chin before she proceeded to the house, the front of which had been converted into a bower of evergreens. Here she raised Sir George and Lady Bulkeley from prostrate attitudes of devotion and gave them her hand to kiss, and her ladyship shed tears of joy at her graciousness.

At Richmond

Then she was conducted by her host, attended by her gentlemen-pensioners bearing their gilded battle-axes, her Captain and yeomen of the Guard, her ladies-in-waiting and maids-of-honour, to a pavilion of white taffeta erected on the other side of the house overlooking the pleasance.

Up the sloping sward came Night, with her attendant Hours in clouds of sable gauze, powdered with silver stars. She had a silver sceptre in her hand, a stuffed owl on her shoulder, and a crown of bats' wings on her flowing hair. Like a vision in a dream she moved, with slow, undulating steps, a mysterious sadness in her eyes, and her lips grave and unsmiling. Looking at her, the young spring day seemed to become shadowy and veiled as if twilight had suddenly fallen.

The Queen, as quick to discern and appreciate beauty as she was intolerant of all ugliness and deformity (except in the case of a d'Alençon, with whom she had gone to greater lengths than with any well-favoured aspirant to her hand), gave voice to her admiration for the fair, young impersonator of Night in the same unprintable language as she had used when Robin first appeared with a dish at her table.

Still greater was her delight, when, after Night had vanished behind a bank of laurels, the same

At Richmond

beautiful maiden appeared again, this time as Aurora, the Goddess of the Dawn, heralding the approach of Flora on her flowery litter borne by Dryads, and followed by a crowd of shepherds and shepherdesses pelting each other with nosegays, and scattering paper roses as they came.

Her steps now were quick and airy, the slender, bare feet scarcely touching the turf beneath her roseate garment. She beat a timbrel as she came, her eyes danced, her lips laughed, her hair flew behind her. She was the incarnation of the morning and of all hopefulness and gladness.

But most enchanted was the Queen with her in the part of the chaste huntress Diana, which she herself had been told so often that she represented without acting. This young Diana, clad in green, with white buskins, brown sandals, and her bow and arrows slung on her back, displayed a skill in horsemanship which amazed her courtly spectators. In full gallop she checked the palfrey on which she rode, and put it through its *ménage* paces. It reared and curveted, advanced and retired, leapt and plunged at her will, as if its mouth were putty beneath her hand. No chivalric Spanish Don could have accomplished such feats with a more masterly ease.

The horse stood still when Diana reined it in and

At Richmond

sprang from the saddle to go with her virgins to bathe her feet in the stream. In a blaze of wrath at Actæon's peeping from the bushes at her she mounted again, and with bow strung started in pursuit of the unfortunate stag into which Actæon had been transformed, followed by her virgins.

It was this performance of Iris in three parts which provided the novel feature of Lady Bulkeley's entertainment and distinguished it from others of its kind. She had found in it some vent for the mimic genius within her, for which in those days of boy Juliets her sex might not seek a field on the public stage.

"Who is she," inquired the Queen, "this maid who rideth so daringly, and can command her face to be melancholy, merry and angry so quickly in turn, and yet beautiful all the time?"

"'Tis a young lady committed to my care for a time by her guardian, a gentleman of Budleigh in Devon," Lady Bulkeley made answer.

"Her name?" the Queen asked.

"Iris Fane, if it please your Majesty. At least so they do call her, but her real name is not known."

And seeing that the Queen was interested, Lady Bulkeley related the story of Iris as she knew it. Some one else listened to it with even more interest than the Queen, and that was the Captain of the Guard.

At Richmond

Not till Iris had appeared on horseback as Diana had Sir Walter Raleigh recognized the girl who had attracted his notice when he was presiding at the Court of the Stannaries on Dartmoor, yet before he recognized her, her face had again started a train of puzzling memories within him. It had recalled—he knew not why—his visit to Vidal's Mount and the startling resemblance between the lady in Zuccherò's picture and one whom he had met under such tragic circumstances in Ireland.

Now when he heard from Lady Bulkeley's lips that the girl was not Devonshire born, but had been cast away on its coast, he felt that here within his grasp was the link which had been missing then in the chain of conjecture.

If this were the little dark-haired child who had gone forth from the ruined bogland castle in the arms of the old minstrel, protected by his own soldiers, she was more nearly related to Gervase Vidal than to his young yeoman Robin Fane.

But once more he shrank from the task of unraveling the mystery. Perhaps what withheld him this time was the reflection that the child's father had been one of those rebels whom, with their Spanish allies, he had suffered to be put to the sword after they had surrendered their arms.

"I have a vacancy among my maids," the Queen

At Richmond

said, "since the Lady Mary Howard saw fit to marry against my desire. Perchance, Madam, you will yield me up this fair mimic to fill it. Methinks she will divert us as much as any Tarleton or Pace."

"I must first await her foster-father's consent, Madam, and I am certain that he will be proud to accede to anything in his power to gratify the wishes of the Queen's most gracious Majesty."

If the good lady had coveted the honour for her own daughters, she did not grudge it to Iris. Indeed she was rather pleased at the prospect of being relieved of her present care of the strange maiden, whose character was somewhat of a riddle to her, and whose beauty so far outshone that of the two remaining chicks of her brood. More than once she had repented of not having postponed Iris's visit till after Het and Cis were disposed of to the husbands she so zealously sought for them.

XXII

GERVASE COMES TO TOWN

LADY BULKELEY handed back a letter dated from Vidal's Mount in Master Birch's handwriting to her husband with the exclamation—

"Thy kinsman is an extraordinary creature."

"Which I have heard you remark more than once, my heart," said Sir George.

"To think that he should thus late in the day propose to return the courtesy of my visit, forgetful apparently of how often before he hath declared himself unable to accept our hospitality."

"What if in the meantime he hath reconsidered the question of marriage, and cometh now to make overtures for Het?"

"Nought more unlikely," said the lady sharply, "he could scarce reconsider what he has never taken into consideration. Nay, 'tis Iris brings him hither. But, thank God, she will be gone from Richmond in the Queen's suite ere he can arrive, or else I should feel guilty of breaking my trust with Esquire Fane."

"How so, what trust?"

Gervase Comes to Town

"Why, thou must know 'twas understood 'twixt us, that Mr. Fane would not so willingly have parted with his foster-daughter and have entrusted her to me had it not been for the queer whimsies that came over her now and again, when she went back to her home after the mischance which laid her by the heels at the Mount. At first she appeared not to be ill-affected by it, and the same as before. But then she began to break out talking in a curious fashion about her 'own green country,' and people at the bottom of the sea, and divers other incomprehensible things. And when it came to your kinsman issuing forth at dead of night to serenade her, and being nearly run through the body for his pains by one of her foster-brothers, and when another day the wench was discovered walking in her sleep towards Vidal's Cove, 'tis no wonder the poor gentleman was at his wits' end, and thought it well to remind me of my offer to take her into our household."

"Which has led to her being promoted to the highest household in the land. So all has ended well," said Sir George with satisfaction.

"But what an escape! Imagine if he had taken into his head to come before the mask! I verily believe he might have bewitched her away. I have not a doubt that when he casts his spells on the maid, she would follow him to the world's

Gervase Comes to Town

end. I should never have been able to face the Esquire."

"Tut, tut! 'Tis not wise to fuss over a danger that is past," remonstrated her husband. Then he added—

"Methinks, if Gervase be as dangerous a person as thou makest him out, a visit from him is in any case scarce desirable."

"I cannot well refuse to receive him, when I tarried so long as I did in his house."

"And uninvited too," Sir George murmured.

Lady Bulkeley said no more. "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," and nowhere is it more persistently effervescent than in the maternal bosom of a fond matchmaking mother.

As she rose from the breakfast table, her large bunch of keys jingling at her girdle, she looked from a casement and saw the younger and comelier of her two unmarried daughters feeding the pigeons.

There was a flutter of grey and white wings and cherry-coloured ribbons in the sunlight as Cis, with her plump arms akimbo, tilted her fresh young face backwards, while one pigeon after the other pecked morsels from her pursed-up lips.

With the coast clear of Iris, such a pretty little domestic picture as this, thought Lady Bulkeley, might well impress the expected guest favourably.

Gervase Comes to Town

Cis was fonder of animals than Het, so certainly it had been a blunder to take Het instead of Cis on that futile expedition into Devon.

Gervase Vidal had sent on his baggage and servants to his kinsman's the morning he walked with Master Birch from Dr. Dee's house in Mortlake towards Richmond. The sun glinted through the rustling trees, casting a lacework of tremulous shadows on the elastic velvet turf over which thousands of rabbits flicked their white tails, or sat in circles on their haunches, looking at the passers-by askance with mischievous soft eyes.

As usual, the conversation was mostly on Master Birch's side, and he found a fertile topic in the famous astrologer with whom Gervase had spent the greater part of the night engaged in listening to the doctor's discourses on alchemy and astronomy.

"I mislike much the looks of that Master Kelly whom our Dr. Dee pays to invoke his spirits," said Master Birch. "I'll warrant 'tis only the evil ones dance at his bidding. His ears were cropped in the pillory, therefore he weareth that unsightly black cap tied under his chin. Well, art thou satisfied with what thou hast seen in the doctor's magic glass? 'Tis the same into which the Queen looked the day she drove in her coach to see him some years since, when

Gervase Comes to Town

his first wife had just died, so she would not enter the house, but the doctor came out to Her Majesty and showed his mirror under the churchyard wall. His long beard was not so milk-white then. When my Lord of Leicester sent word to him to say he was bringing the Polish Ambassador to dine at his house, the doctor said he could not afford the honour of entertaining them, but the Queen sent him forty angels to cover expenses, and the banquet took place."

Gervase walked on beside his chattering companion, lost in thought. The old astrologer, with his tall figure and long white beard flowing over his loose purple artist's gown, whom the little boys in the streets of Mortlake ran away from in terror because he was a "conjurer," had told him things which gave food for reflection.

What he had seen in the mirror had been the face of Iris. In answer to the old man's questions, he said that this was all he saw.

"Iris is a spirit that hath manifested itself here more than once, with Uriel," Dr. Dee had said, and Gervase had explained that the Iris of whom he spoke was no disembodied spirit but one he knew in the flesh, and related his sudden and strange attraction towards her after years in which she had grown up in his neighbourhood, and he had been indifferent.

Gervase Comes to Town

The hope that the learned astrologer would be able to cast some light on the reason for this attraction was the chief object of Gervase's visit to him that day.

"A clue to her identity lies hid somewhere," was Dr. Dee's pronouncement after listening to Iris's history. "Belike in some jewel or clothing she wore at the time of the wreck."

Gervase at once remembered the old cloak, and came to the conclusion that the great Dr. Dee, with all his learning and marvellous world-renowned knowledge of the occult sciences, had only hit upon the same possible solution to the mystery as that offered long ago by Mad Moll, the uneducated wise woman of Saltern.

"Thou must bring her hither and let me see this Iris who is not a spirit."

"But she is there in your mirror."

"Only thou seest her there. The image of a man's destiny, be it his love or no, is only visible to himself. She is not far from here ; so when thou listest, bring her to me."

It was on these parting words of the old astrologer that Gervase pondered as he and Master Birch walked through the sylvan landscape towards Richmond. Would Iris walk beside him along this mossy path, with the birds singing above them ? He pictured her

Gervase Comes to Town

and himself leaving the glory of a spring morning such as this behind them, and stepping into the gloom and shadows of that low-roofed, rambling old house which Dr. Dee inhabited, next the tapestry works at Mortlake, with its bulging beams and uneven floors.

What would Iris see in the Doctor's magic mirror, or in the globe of his great crystal? A continuation of what she had seen in his own, or something more definite, perchance? He had longed a hundred times to have her back again in his turret chamber, where she had lain after her accident, so helpless and dependent on him. How easily he had let her go when she regained her health! How often he had repented it, and had tried, by exercising his powers of willing, and even by his gift of music, to bring her to him again. But the influences of the home in which she had been brought up were too strong to be counteracted when she was in their midst.

The Iris he had chanced to meet one wintry day, riding on the cliffs across the snow, with a foster-brother on either side, had not been the dreamful Iris of the turret chamber, whose eyes saw visions, but an Iris infected by the fever of patriotism and hatred of the Spaniard which prevailed around her, and was then at its highest ferment.

"They are coming—the Spaniards. Every one is getting ready for them. But you, 'tis said, will do

Gervase Comes to Town

nought, only lie low amongst your books, as if your country were in no danger. Prove that they are wrong who say this ; prove that they are wrong, and that I am right."

Hastily she had flung the words at him, with cheeks aflame in the cold, and ridden back to the two who waited for her, glowering at him a few paces away.

And so he had been stung to take his part in the national defence by one whose heart he knew clung in secret to another country, the sad emerald island, ever at enmity, either open or veiled, with its sister. He had armed himself, and taught the clowns on his estates to trail a pike, fire an arquebus, march and countermarch, had mustered with them round Elizabeth at the camp in Tilbury dockyard, and had the Duke of Parma landed, would have shed blood or let his be shed, he who hated fighting and war, despite his long line of warlike ancestors.

Now it was Iris again, though this time unwittingly, who had roused him from his ordinary habits.

The thought of her was drawing him to his kinsman's house. But he was to see Iris before he got there.

XXIII

KNIGHT AND PRISONER

As they emerged from a coppice on rising ground, and paused to look at the fair view of silvery, winding Thames and shimmering landscape beyond, Gervase and Master Birch found themselves close to the Palace. There at their feet it lay, with its many pinnacles, its maze of brick courts, its great buttery and buttery chamber, its fish-larder and flesh-larder, its flower-gardens and orchard. Above the clock-case, in the central tower, the royal flags yet floated on the breeze, and the great bell beneath clanged the hour.

It was the hour of the departure of the Court from Richmond, for, as it happened, contrary to Lady Bulkeley's calculations, Gervase Vidal had arrived just before, instead of after, that event.

The Queen's barge, gorgeous with gilding and fringed cloth of silver hangings, lay at the stairs. The path from the privy garden that led down to them was carpeted with crimson, and the gentlemen-ushers, pensioners, and yeomen of the Guard kept

Knight and Prisoner

the loyal inhabitants of Richmond, who had flocked to the riverside to see Her Majesty embark, from pressing too near the royal pathway. Trumpets sounded ; a murmur of ecstasy came from the throats of the people assembled at the stairs as the Queen appeared, glittering, as always, from head to foot with precious stones. Her jupon was quilted with pearls, her violet velvet gown scarcely visible for the jewelled eyelets with which it was thickly sewn. The ermine cloak hanging from her shoulders was finished with a ruff, nearly as gigantic as the one which rose from her throat, vying in height with the wide, piled-up wig.

The Queen stood some minutes returning the salutations and "God bless your Majestys" of the Richmond folk with gracious smiles and nods, now and then exclaiming, "I thank you, good people." Behind her lady of the bedchamber came the beautiful maids-of-honour who had often flitted up and down the streets of the little riverside town during the last month, under the ægis of their duenna, Mistress Blanch Parry, like brilliant butterflies, to make purchases of embroidery-silks, cheese-cakes and sweetmeats in the shops. Towards one of these, the youngest, though not the least in stature, while the Queen stood bowing on the embarking-place, a figure, darkly but richly clad, advanced from the little crowd.

Knight and Prisoner

"Iris, come with me," he said in a low voice close to her ear.

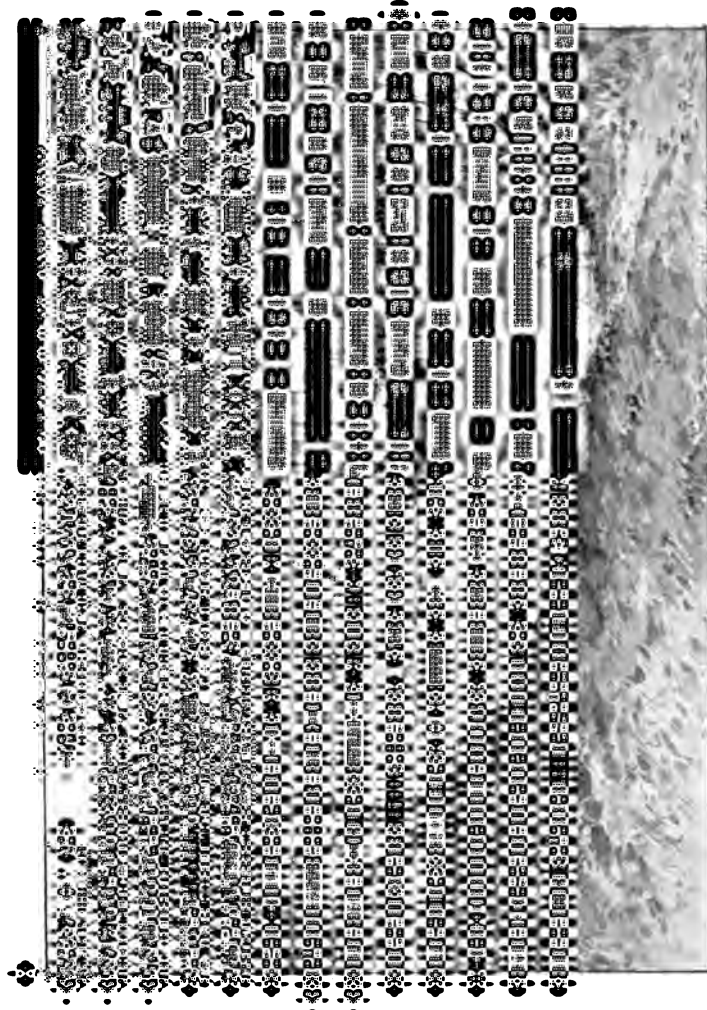
Though not heard by others he was seen, and a vigilant young yeoman of the Guard hustled him back. A stir and hum behind her made the Queen look round as quickly as her two ruffs and towering headdress would allow.

"Who is that person?" she asked the gentleman in attendance nearest to her. It was Master, afterwards Sir John Harington, the poet and translator of Ariosto, he whom she was wont to call her saucy god-son, who answered—

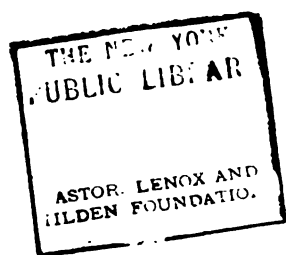
"Madam, methinks 'tis one of your subjects who is distinguished by much learning that he hath brought to small account. His name is Vidal. I only conclude that it is he through his companion, Master Birch, with whom I am well acquainted and who was sometime his tutor."

"Vidal—Gervase Vidal of Devon," the Queen repeated. "Beshrew me, was he not one of those loyal Catholics who brought a contingent to our forces at Tilbury. Bring him hither to me and he shall receive his reward."

Gervase came and knelt before the Queen with so much ease and dignity that he might have been in the habit of going on his knee to his sovereign by the river-side every day of his life. The Queen drew



RICHMOND PALACE.



Knight and Prisoner

her hand, sparkling with gems, out of her perfumed glove with stiffened gauntlet—

“Here, god-son, the loan of your sword,” said she, turning to Master John Harington.

The naked blade flashed in the air and came down on Gervase’s shoulder.

“I dub thee knight; thou hast deserved the title thy fathers bore. Rise, Sir Gervase Vidal.”

The unlooked-for honour thus unconventionally and impulsively bestowed was so little coveted by the recipient of it, that as he rose to his feet he would gladly have shaken it from him.

“Many would say, Madam, that I am not deserving of your gracious favour,” Gervase said, “and belike they are right.”

“You show a becoming modesty, Sir Gervase,” said the Queen, and passed to her barge. Early next morning she was to start on a progress into Hertfordshire, and that night would be entertaining the Ambassadors at Whitehall, so she had little time to spare.

Iris, with her eyes still hanging dreamfully on the figure of the new knight, followed in the procession with faltering steps. A scowl darkened the sunny countenance of Robin, for he it was who had tried in the exercise of his duty to push Gervase back when he spoke to Iris. Mrs. Throgmorton put

Knight and Prisoner

her arm round the youngest maid-of-honour as the royal party embarked.

"Sweet child, what aileth thee?" she asked.

"He said, 'Come with me.' Belike he meant to go with him to my country—my own country."

"What strange talk!" Elizabeth Throgmorton exclaimed. "Is not this thy country?"

"No, no! It is greener, and wilder, my country; with high mountains and dark forests."

Iris's face wore the same melancholy expression as it had done when she represented "Night" in Lady Bulkeley's mask. Since then Elizabeth Throgmorton and every one else had known her only as a high-spirited girl and merry mimic who had won by her beauty and joyousness the hearts of all her fellow-maids, especially her own. This, the fairest and stateliest of those young Elizabeths who moved like satellites round the majestic sun of their great namesake, had responded warmly to the girlish adoration Iris had shown her from the first night when she had taken the new maid-of-honour under her wing.

"Nay, look not so sad," said Elizabeth. "I shall think ill of that Sir Gervase Vidal if a whisper from him in thy ear can so change thy mood from gay to grave. See yonder woodlands and green hills laughing in the sunshine; is that not a fair enough country to please thy eyes?"

Knight and Prisoner

"Fair, but not mine," said Iris, in the voice that sounded so strange and full of longing and sadness to Mrs. Throgmorton.

The barge with a flourish of trumpets had been loosened from its moorings and was gliding slowly over the rippling river. Iris still looked back, gazing intently at the spot on the bank where Gervase had stood. He was lost now to view, for a group had gathered round him, and he seemed to have been borne away in their midst.

What had really happened was that some one who had been watching Gervase Vidal's and Master Birch's movements ever since they had set foot in London, had come forward when the Queen had gone on board her barge and assailed him in vituperative language as a recusant, and one who consorted with Jesuits and seminary priests.

The penal laws against the Catholics had been made more stringent since the discovery of Father Gerard's plot, and the zealous Jesuit-hunter, Master Topcliffe, who spent all his days in tracking and arresting recusant Papists, kept Her Majesty's prisons well filled with them, as well as with their keenest opponents, the persecuted Puritans. Authorized religious intolerance was the dark blot on the long and brilliant reign of a sovereign whose personal views were far from narrow and to whose sense of

Knight and Prisoner

colour and love of beauty the ritual of the old religion strongly appealed.

"The Queen's Majesty would have been better advised had she clapped you in the stocks instead of on the shoulder," snarled the lynx-eyed Topcliffe.

"Why?" asked Gervase calmly.

"You know why. Did you not own that you were unworthy of the honour conferred on you just now? No wonder your conscience rebuked you in the acceptance thereof. You who have not kept your churches, and are hand-in-glove with the crew of Papists and stirrers-up of sedition and strife in this peaceable Protestant realm. Have not you and your chaplain visited that Romish nest at Harrow-on-the-Hill? Have you not been in league with the Jesuit scribbler Southwell?"

"You are in error, good sir," Master Birch said, unable to keep silent. "If Mr. Vidal hath not kept his churches, he has paid his fines. He is acquainted with none at Harrow, and his chaplain hath never left the county of Devon."

"And to my loss I only know the poet and martyr, Southwell through his works," Gervase answered.

"'Martyr.' You call the dog that! Enough; you shall be put under lock and key at any rate, whilst further inquiries are made concerning your dealings. Methinks you are too suspicious a subject to be left

Knight and Prisoner

lurking at large 'twixt the house of a sorcerer and Richmond Palace."

Mr. Topcliffe caught Gervase by the wrist, and called his myrmidons to take him to a boat that lay at anchor by the bank.

"Sir," protested Master Birch, "is this meet treatment for one whose loyalty Her Majesty hath so recently recognized by a public mark of her esteem?"

"Tush! The Queen is too trusting and undiscerning in these matters. She leaves the unmasking of double-dealing recusants to me, her deputed agent."

"Then, if Sir Gervase Vidal is thus to be the victim of shameful injustice, I must ask to share his imprisonment."

"Nay, dear Master Birch, thou canst serve me better by going to my kinsman, Sir George Bulkeley, to explain the cause of my non-appearance at his house."

"The dotard is tarred with the same brush as yourself. He shall come along," said the pitiless Topcliffe.

So the pair, the young and the old man, were taken by armed constables to the long boat, and rowed down the river, whence the royal barge had drifted not long before. Instead of lying at his kinsman's at Richmond that night as he had expected, Sir Gervase lay, in the first blush of his new honours, in the Gatehouse at Westminster, a prisoner.

XXIV

THE MERRY MAIDS OF HONOUR

IRIS knew nothing of what had befallen Sir Gervase, nor suspected that he lay in durance not very far away.

Her mood of sadness had passed from her like a cloud from the April sky, and at night when the maids-of-honour retired to their dormitory at Whitehall, Iris was willing to respond as usual to their bidding that she should amuse them with her acting and mimicry.

All the young Elizabeths were in *négligé* attire. Some had twisted up their hair under their lace night-caps, others had it flowing loose about their shoulders. They sat on the floor on pillows that they had pulled out of their beds. Despite the fatigue of the past day, and the prospect of starting on a progress early on the morrow, they seemed not in the least sleepy or inclined to repose themselves.

Their bright wide-awake eyes were fixed admiringly on Iris, who stood in the middle of the long room, going through parts in the plays which she had seen acted since she came to Court, by the children of Her

The Merry Maids of Honour

Majesty's Chapel, or by Master Shakespeare's company.

Not Burbage himself could have moved an audience to greater terror than Iris, as the Jew of Malta, or Alleyne to greater pity, as Queen Dido of Carthage. Peals of silvery laughter echoed in the beams of the roof, when, with a sudden leap from tragedy to comedy, this one slim girl brought before her fellow-maids the grotesque figure of Falstaff, and the buxom merry wives in Windsor Forest.

After this *tour de force*, Iris threw herself down beside Elizabeth Throgmorton, but she was not allowed to rest for many minutes.

"Come, Iris," said fair Mrs. Bridges, "now thou shalt act our lovers for us. Here, out of Her Majesty's sight and hearing, we may breathe of love and lovers."

"Prithee let the child alone now. Methinks she must be worn out," Mrs. Throgmorton said, somewhat anxiously.

"Yes, yes," cried all the other Elizabeths in chorus. "We will have her do what Mrs. Bridges asks withal."

So Iris rose and went into the middle of the room once more.

She raised one shoulder higher than the other, thrust out her chin, and looked aslant at them out of the corner of her eyes. Before she had opened her

The Merry Maids of Honour

mouth they recognized Sir Robert Cecil, Lord Treasurer Burleigh's diminutive heir, who, if he was no rival in looks to the majority of the Queen's admirers, made up for it by surpassing them in fulsome flattery, having cultivated it to a fine art.

"The hunchback secretary!" exclaimed the maids. "Who would own to being beloved by such a gnome? Nay, Her Majesty may keep *him* to herself."

"Iris has begun with the lowest, and will get to the highest," one said, and looked at Elizabeth Throgmorton. Harington, Fulke Greville, Carey, courtier after courtier followed, Iris mimicking their tricks of speech and manner to the life. Each portrait, as it came, was hailed with applause and mirth. Lastly she drew herself very erect, with a carriage of "ascendancy and greatness," twirled the turned-up ends of an imaginary curly beard, and, in a soft Devonian bur, uttered a string of euphuistic compliments such as she had heard Sir Walter Raleigh glibly pour into the ears of Her Majesty, while she had stood in attendance behind the Queen's chair of state.

Now the bright eyes of the laughing maids-of-honour were turned on Elizabeth Throgmorton, who blushed hotly under their fire. Instinctively she put her right hand over her left to hide a diamond flashing there.

But an unexpected interruption saved her from the

The Merry Maids of Honour

raillery which her companions were about to discharge at her. A door at the far end of the room opened, and there appeared a quaint, night-capped figure, with a candle in one hand and a book in the other, and huge spectacles on his nose. This apparition sent the maids flying on to or under their beds, with little squeals of feigned terror. Only Iris stood her ground ; but the old diplomatist, Sir Francis Knollys, whose apartments at Whitehall were next those of the maids-of-honour, pushed her out of his way as he stalked to the other end of the dormitory and back again, reading aloud in Latin. When he took another turn instead of disappearing behind the arras, most of the young noblewomen emerged from under their beds, and besought him to desist.

"Enough, enough, Sir Francis ; prithee depart," said one.

"We are half asleep, and die to lay ourselves abed," cried another.

"'Tis churlish, Sir Francis, to disturb us so," declared a third.

"Disturb ! Marry, methinks 'tis I have most ground to complain of being disturbed !" exclaimed the old gentleman. "What study or sleep can I get with all your frisking and heyng about on t'other side of the wall ? I vow that I will not leave you in possession of your apartment till you

The Merry Maids of Honour

promise to leave me in possession of my peace and quiet."

He began to walk up and down and declaim again, and Iris, who had put a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles belonging to Mistress Blanch Parry on her nose, followed in his wake, and imitated his gait and the action of his head and arms. At this the merriment burst out afresh, and Sir Francis, turning round abruptly, saw the cause of it.

"This, in sooth, is the sauciest wench of the bunch," said Sir Francis.

Iris swept the spectacles off her nose, and kneeled on the floor before him, looking up into his face with pathetic violet eyes and laughing lips.

"Only leave us, sir, and I promise, on behalf of them all, that we will be quiet as mice. We wish you good-night, sir, and sweet repose."

"I will go now; but mark you well, if I hear another sound, I shall come again and drone Latin into your ears till cock-crow."

The old gentleman tottered through the arras. When he was gone no one spoke, save in a whisper, to her bed-fellow. Mrs. Bridges asked hers to tell her the story of Lady Mary Howard's flounce.

"'Twas wondrously richly wrought, powdered with priceless gems, and the Queen envied it," said the maid; "and one day Her Majesty asked Lady Mary

The Merry Maids of Honour

to lend her the black velvet kirtle whereon the flounce was. Her Majesty put on the kirtle for the dancing, and Lady Mary not being so high as Her Majesty, the kirtle was too short for her height. Her Majesty asked every one how they liked her new fancied suit. At last she did ask Lady Mary 'if it were not made too short and ill-becoming.' Lady Mary said that it was so for Her Majesty. 'Why, then,' said Her Majesty, 'if it become not me, as being too short, it shall never become thee as being too fine.' After that Lady Mary never dared to don the kirtle again."

"And in revenge she coquetted with my Lord Essex, hath since wedded another, and been banished from Court?" asked Mrs. Bridges, who, like Iris, was a newcomer, in a sleepy whisper.

"Yes. Lady Mary was very fair, and loved to be admired as much as Her Majesty doth, and she was very proud, and was wonted to make pert answers when Her Majesty taunted her."

"So should I, methinks, if——"

The whispering ceased as lovely Mrs. Bridges passed into the land of dreams, whither by this time all the maids-of-honour had gone except two.

Iris lay beside Mrs. Throgmorton still awake. The moonbeams coming through the wide bay window cast a silvery radiance on the white beds and faces of the fair sleepers whose silken garments

The Merry Maids of Honour

and fine linen lay about the floor like snow-drifts in the moonlight.

Elizabeth Throgmorton did not breathe as if she slept like the rest, though she lay still with her eyes closed. When a sound came from her lips that was half-sigh and half-sob Iris said—

“Sweetest Mrs. Throgmorton, thou turned from me without a good-night. Art thou sorely vexed with me?”

“It pleased me ill that you should make others merry by mocking my husband.”

“Husband!” exclaimed Iris.

“Hush, child, hush. Alack, you know now what only one other knows besides the clergyman who joined us in the chapel at Durham House, and he is your foster-brother.”

“Robin—Robin knows?” murmured Iris in still greater astonishment

“Yea; and the secret is as safe with him as if buried in the depths of the earth,” said Elizabeth.

“And so it shall be with me. But, oh, sweet lady, why should it be a secret—why? How can a bold and gallant gentleman bear not to proclaim proudly to all the world that he hath wed so beautiful and gentle a wife? ’Tis curious not to claim openly a precious possession, but to hold it privily like smuggled goods. And then if I were in thy shoes,

The Merry Maids of Honour

sweet Mrs. Throgmorton, methinks 'twould kill me to see daily one who had wooed and won me wooing another, even if that other were the Queen ! ”

“ Thou art talking of what thou dost not understand. I would not bring him I love to ruin for the sake of being known as his wife. He hath all from the Queen, and must seem to worship her in return. If she guessed, the Queen, that he were wed, think what her wrath would be ! ”

A shudder passed through the slender limbs of Iris's bed-fellow—

“ 'Twould be ruin—ruin to us,” she added.

“ 'Twould mean the loss of the Queen's favour belike,” persisted Iris, “ but that would not be ruin. He would still have his ships and mariners to send forth to find new countries and waylay Spanish treasure. He would still have his great talents that he could turn to greater uses perchance were he not always bound to philandering about the Court.”

“ Child, thou dost not love Sir Walter as doth thy brother Robin.”

“ Because I mimicked him ? I mimic all, whether I like or dislike them. I cannot help it. Methink 'tis because I know not who I am myself, that I love to act other people.”

“ I have marked your look when he hath held

The Merry Maids of Honour

speech with you," Mrs. Throgmorton went on. "'Tis a look of mistrust methought, perhaps of fear."

Iris was silent. If it was true that her looks betrayed fear and mistrust instead of confidence when Sir Walter Raleigh spoke to her, it was because he always bent on her so searching and inquiring a gaze as if she puzzled him, and she wondered why.

XXV

AFTER THE TOURNEY

ROBIN looked suspiciously at a missive which had been put into his hand by some one unknown to him in the tilt-yard, after a joust of arms held there by the gentlemen-tilters in honour of the return of the run-away Earl from the Huguenot Wars.

When news had come from France of his brother having fallen in the field and of Essex exposing himself to danger on every possible occasion, Elizabeth had been distraught with fears on account of her young favourite. She had written to the French king to bid him remember that the commander of the forces she had sent to his aid "needed the bridle rather than the spur." Then when several orders for him to come back were only met by Essex with further pleas for leave of absence, the Queen at last threatened to make him an example to all the world if "he left not his charge and returned immediately." To her surprise and relief this peremptory command had brought Essex to her side, and instead

After the Tourney

of being greeted with a fusilade of fury for his disobedience as he had expected, he had been feasted and *flattered* and had made such honeyed speeches to his royal mistress that he had cajoled her into promising he should resume his command at the post of danger within a week.

So that afternoon, my Lord of Essex with his six hundred men in tawny feathers had shone like the May sun in splendid armour in the tourney, his brodered blue scarf and curled locks floating on the soft breeze. He carried all before him, and beat Cumberland and Blount from the lists. Yet all the time he despised in his soldierly heart this sham fighting, and hankered for the fierce delights of that real warfare in which he had been engaged in France. Raleigh watched him darkly frowning. Yet jealous as he was of the Earl's presence, he would fain that he had been brought to heel for longer service than a week, for with his young rival at Court, he was more likely to be spared for the expedition to the Azores to seize King Philip's "Silver fleet" on its way from the West, on which he had set his heart. Though he had been appointed Vice-Admiral of the fleet, Raleigh feared something might prevent his going to sea at the last minute, and as it proved his fears were to be justified. When death took Hatton and war claimed Essex, Elizabeth would not part with Raleigh, and his

After the Tourney

cousin, Sir Richard Grenville, was appointed Vice-Admiral instead of him. Afterwards the thwarted favourite was to find some consolation for not being present in writing the true account of Sir Richard's brave fight on the *Revenge* against overwhelming odds in his vivid and eloquent style, a fight of which great poets have sung and great historians have written since.

But to return to Robin as he stood in the now deserted tilt-yard, meditating on the note. It was addressed to Mistress Iris Fane, and the handwriting was the same as he had seen on a parcel of books which had come to the Manor one day from the Mount after Iris's stay there. This was why it excited his suspicion. Though he saw Iris every day at a distance their actual meetings were rare; but as it happened to-day they were both to be free of their duties at the same time, and Robin was expecting to see Iris appear in the outside gallery above the yard and signal to him to follow her to the privy garden, where they would walk up and down together on a terrace above the river, or sit side by side on a circular seat surrounding the trunk of a spreading oak.

Robin felt that he could not put the missive away in his pouch and forget all about it, as he might have done if he were not to meet her to whom it was

After the Tourney

addressed so soon. He paced beneath the gallery, and in a few minutes he heard Iris's voice above him.

"Hie thee to the garden, Robin, and I will come thither ; but I may only tarry a little while, for Mrs. Throgmorton wants me."

"'Tis always Mrs. Throgmorton," murmured Robin to himself, opening the postern-gate and passing into the garden.

During this first year of Iris's service at Court as maid-of-honour, Robin had more than once felt he had cause to grumble at Elizabeth Throgmorton monopolizing his foster-sister's and whilom comrade's company.

"Methinks I might say 'tis always Sir Walter Raleigh." She had fluttered to his side as noiselessly and swiftly as a butterfly and overheard his spoken thoughts. With sisterly freedom she put her hand through his arm as they crossed the sward, and those who chanced to be looking out on the fair May evening from the palace windows thought it would be hard to match this brother and sister—they were generally regarded as such—for their goodly carriage and comely looks.

The lengthening sunlight was flooding the world with a dazzling brilliance. The green of the foliage was intensely vivid, and London's countless spires,

After the Tourney

fanés and towers shone out white against the lavender sky banked with changing clouds which cast deep shadows on the river and turf. Even the dark pile of Westminster Abbey rising not far away in this light had taken a hue of ethereal violet. The air was sweet with the perfume of lilacs and hawthorn, and reminded both youth and maid of their Devonshire home.

Iris, in her yellow gown and creamy ruff, stood beneath the oak-tree with the sun glinting through the dancing leaves on her dusky hair, which nothing could make lie flat beneath her coif. It rose now in fine unruly tendrils over the pearls which outlined the little peak of brown velvet in the centre of her forehead.

Robin looked at her beauty with pride, and felt sorry for Hal and Frank who had not seen her for so long, and must sorely miss the sight of her now they were for a short spell come home from sea again.

"Here's a letter for you," he said.

"A letter for me!" she exclaimed, taking it. "Who can it be from?"

"God knows. A ragged messenger prayed me to give it into your hands just now."

He watched her tear the cover and read a closely-written sheet with eager interest, and his face clouded.

After the Tourney

The letter was dated from the Gatehouse, Westminster, and in the handwriting of Master Birch.

" MISTRESS IRIS,

" Sir Gervase Vidal still doth languish here in noisome confinement an untried prisoner.

" His accusers dally over their search for evidence against him which must be more arduous than looking for a needle in a bottle of hay, for surely none exists. Sir Gervase hath appealed to none but his kinsman and late guardian, Sir George Bulkeley, to intercede for him with Her Majesty, but inasmuch as that gentleman either cannot or will not find occasion to approach the Queen on his behalf, I venture, knowing that in you he hath a friend at Court, to entreat your bringing his case, if a chance offers itself, before the Queen. Mayhap Her Majesty's Captain of the Guard, Sir Walter Raleigh, to whom Sir Gervase is known, he having once lodged in his house, will testify to his innocence of all concernment with the Jesuits and their plots. 'Tis evident that the enemies of our religion have in this case been over-zealous, and have mistook Sir Gervase for another esquire from the country, who did arrive in London at the same time, and visited Dr. Dee earlier on that morning in company with a priest of Harrow. Methinks were it brought to Her Majesty's notice that one she had highly honoured

After the Tourney

was so quickly overtaken by unmerited disgrace, she would have it inquired into. Unbeknown to Sir Gervase these lines are inscribed to you

by Your Servant,

THOMAS BIRCH."

When Iris had grasped the drift of Master Birch's letter she knitted her brows and was lost in thought for a moment, then she looked up and said decisively—"Robin, we will take barge this instant for Durham House."

"Durham House!" exclaimed Robin. "Methought you were in a hurry to rejoin Mrs. Throgmorton."

"'Tis more pressing to try and right a wrong," was the answer. "I would fain see Sir Walter in the privacy of his own house, rather than at the palace in the presence of the Queen, where I could not discourse freely as I would of this matter."

"I am to do your bidding and be kept in ignorance of what this matter may be."

"Robin, dear boy, dear brother, be not so easily affronted about nothing. You shall read the letter whilst we are being rowed to Durham House. Only be quick; hail barge or boat, I care not which, without delay."

Still Robin demurred.

"Sir Walter," said he, "will, I know, be much en-

After the Tourney

gaged this evening. 'Tis the eve of Master Spenser's departure for Ireland, and Sir Walter hath invited certain gentlemen to take their farewell of him at his house."

"Nevertheless I will have speech with him before night, and if you are not disposed to bear me company, I must go alone."

Iris stamped her foot impatiently on the paved path, for though Robin had now turned towards the stairs it seemed to her he moved with a provoking slowness and sulky reluctance.

Sir Walter Raleigh sat with his guests on a dais in the hall with marble pillars. Flagons and goblets stood on the long oaken table, but some of the guests had withdrawn from it and were seated in the windows playing cards and smoking huge silver pipes. Christopher Marlowe and Harriott were there, and Sir Walter's brother, Carew Raleigh, and the astrologer Dr. Dee in his rich purple gown. On Sir Walter's right hand was Edmund Spenser, who after a year and half's sojourn in London which had seen the publication and great success of his *Faëry Queen*, was yet going back to his clerkship in Munster a disappointed man. The glamour of the Court of Gloriana had soon worn off for the poet, and when he was in Ireland once more he was to record his bitter regret

After the Tourney

for having hung on there so long in vain hopes of advancement.

“Full little knowest thou that hast not tride
What hell it is in suing long to bide ;
To loose good dayes that might be better spent ;
To waste long nights in pensive discontent ;
To speed to-day, to be put back to-morrow ;
To feed on hope, to pine with fear and sorrow.
.
.
.
.
.
.
.
To fret thy soul with crosses and with cares,
To eat thy heart through comfortless despairs.”

By this time Spenser had come to the conclusion that he had little substantial aid to hope from his great friends Essex and Raleigh. The latter, much as he might prize the gentle poet's friendship and society, was becoming more and more absorbed in those great schemes in which public spirit and private greed were so curiously mingled. Spenser had often waited in his ante-chamber neglected, while Sir Walter interviewed the captains of his privateers and other mariners and travellers from the high seas.

But now when he realized that the poet would be gone on the morrow, he was showing him high honour and had expressed unbounded chagrin at his near departure.

Conversation had gradually soared above the ordinary topics and books of the day, and taken a speculative turn. Carew Raleigh had asked one of the party for a definition of soul, who had replied that “it

After the Tourney

would be better to be careful how souls might be saved than curious as to their essence."

"I have been," said Sir Walter, drawn into the discussion by this answer, "a scholar sometime at Oxford; I have answered under a Bachelor of Arts and had talk with divers; but hitherto on this point, to wit what the reasonable soul of man is, I have not by any been informed."

"'Tis surely, as the divines say, the spiritual and immortal substance . breathed into man by God, whereby he lives, moves and understandeth, and is distinguished from other creatures," Spenser suggested, with a light in his eyes.

"Yes, but what is that spiritual and immortal substance?"

"Soul," replied the minister who had first answered Carew Raleigh.

"Now, sir, you are not arguing like a scholar," said Sir Walter.

"'Tis not unscholarlike and sometimes necessary in such disputes as these to run *in circulum*."

"Marry then, if asked for a definition of Aristotle's 'Ens Entium,' thou wouldst say 'twas God," put in Christopher Marlowe. He threw back the leonine head with its shock of thick hair that crowned a thin and boyish figure. Then he drew his pipe from between his lips and added, "If thou, Sir Walter, hast

After the Tourney

been perplexed as to what soul is, neither have I hitherto been able to learn what God is."

This avowal was somewhat startling even from one of the company who was said to be a member of what his enemies called Sir Walter Raleigh's School of Atheism, meaning the gatherings in which he invited freedom of discussion amongst his friends on profound subjects.

The youthful dramatist, who liked to air his scepticism at Sir Walter's table and had put into the mouth of his Faustus the words—

"I count religion but a childish toy,
And hold there is no sin but ignorance,"

was drawing nearer than he thought to the solution of the great mystery of the soul. Not long afterwards he was to meet that ingloriously tragic death from the sword of a tavern toper that deprived the world of a genius which, brilliant as its performance had been, had fulfilled but half its promise.

Sir Walter, weary of the "circular" argument, was about to adjourn the disputation as unprofitable, when, looking through the clouds of smoke from the dais down the vista of pillars towards the entrance to the hall, he saw his youngest yeoman of the Guard approaching with his foster-sister. It was the first time that he had seen the two alone side by side since the June morning long ago when their backs on a

After the Tourney

Devonshire stile had inspired one of his rare poetic outbreaks.

Often as he had seen them apart since then, he had never till now recognized them as his "Phillida and Corydon."

XXVI

IRIS PLEADS IN A DISTINGUISHED COMPANY

"WHY, boy, methought thou wouldst be spending thy leisure at the bears or the cockpit," said Sir Walter when Robin drew near.

"'Tis a greater pleasure, sir, to spend it with my sister when I have the chance. Here she is, and would fain speak with you, sir, on a subject she saith is of great import."

Iris came forward swiftly, quite unabashed at the presence of Sir Walter's guests, because she was almost unconscious of anything but her mission. All her thoughts were concentrated on Gervase Vidal's unjust imprisonment, and the desire for his speedy release. She had not realized till she got Master Birch's letter that it might be in her power to help him. She stood very erect with her rounded chin uplifted and the rays of the setting sun reflected in her eyes.

In her yellow gown she reminded Spenser of a long-stemmed daffadowndilly swaying in the March wind beside some Irish stream. But Kit Marlowe, as

Iris pleads in Distinguished Company

he looked at her, thought instinctively of his own immortal lines—

“Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?”

Dr. Dee's ferret eyes were also attracted by the figure of the maid-of-honour in yellow, and they scrutinized her sharply from head to foot.

Before Raleigh could propose withdrawing to a more private place to hear what she had to say, Iris cast the letter on the table before him and began an impassioned protest.

At first there was a quiver of indignation in her voice as she spoke of the strange injustice which had suffered one who had been singled out for distinction by his Sovereign to be in prison for more than a year afterwards for an imaginary offence. She even made bold to reproach Sir Walter with his indifference to the unjust treatment of a man whom he had held in high enough regard to honour in the past by accepting his hospitality and friendship.

Sir Walter would have felt the rebuke more had he not again experienced one of those remarkable transitions from the present back into the past. Every intonation of the girl's voice, every gesture reminded him of the fair, distraught woman in the besieged castle among the Kerry mountains. She too had addressed him first in words of anger at

Iris pleads in Distinguished Company

wrong, she too had changed her tone to one of pleading when she prayed for her child's safety—the child who now stood before him (for he had no further doubt that it was she) in the full flower of her ripe and graceful maidenhood.

"To-morrow I will bring Sir Gervase Vidal's case to Her Majesty's ear," he said, with an abstraction unlike the ordinary brisk, business-like manner in which he received appeals to use his personal influence with the Queen.

"'Twere better it should be to-night," Iris said.

"To-night the Queen holds no Court, and hath returned to her private closet where she will belike sup and play primero with the Earl of Essex."

"But Sir Walter Raleigh hath always easy access to Her Majesty."

"Nevertheless he playeth not readily second fiddle to my Lord the Earl. Methinks Sir Gervase hath lain so many nights imprisoned at the Gatehouse, Mistress Iris, that one more or less will make little difference to him. To-morrow I promise you to petition his release."

Dr. Dee caught the name. "This then is the embodied spirit Iris," he muttered in his beard. Then, coming forward from the recess whence he had been listening and watching whilst Iris's young voice had vibrated through the hall, he addressed her—

Iris pleads in Distinguished Company

"On the day he visited me at my house in Mortlake, your brother spoke much of you to me. 'Twas your face that appeared to him in my mirror, and he half promised to bring you to see me. Then I was told his adventure befell him close on the heels of the honour of knighthood, and I have heard no more of him."

Iris turned her eyes on the old astrologer in bewilderment.

"My brother, sir? You are mistaken. I bear no relationship to Sir Gervase Vidal, and was a stranger to him till he rescued me from dire peril near his house, since which time I have been nigh to become a stranger to him again, but a grateful one."

The old man shook his head.

"Nay," said he, "the blood that runs in his veins runs in yours, and even if it were not so you are twin souls. So much I can tell without seeing you together. I can divine too that yours are the eyes of the seer. Come, with our host's permission I will converse with you in a withdrawing-room, and you shall exercise your powers of vision if you so desire, as I carry with me a pocket crystal."

It surprised Robin that Iris, instead of being alarmed at Dr. Dee's strange proposal, should follow him from the dais behind the arras as if it were the most natural thing in the world. He waited her return ill at ease, feeling that he ought to have

Iris pleads in Distinguished Company

interfered, and reminded Iris that she would be late for her evening duties at Whitehall. Besides, was it safe to let his foster-sister hold a conference in private with a notorious conjurer?

Sir Walter tried to reassure him.

"You may trust the learned Doctor, boy," said he. "He is a great power, and hath long been a *persona grata* with the Queen's Majesty. Only lately he hath proved himself a benefactor to this realm by warning Her Majesty of a plot to poison her hatched by her Spanish physician, Lopez. Not till Dr. Dee unmasked the treacherous scoundrel would she believe what a viper she had been nurturing for years in her Court."

"Learned or no, methinks he must have been mad to talk of my sister having Vidal blood in her veins," said Robin, waxing under the stress of emotion bolder and less monosyllabic than it was his wont to be in his Captain's presence.

"Vidal blood, no! But thy *bête noire* hath other blood in his."

The party had broken up into groups, and some had taken their leave. Spenser sat alone, gazing his farewell through one of the casements at his dear Thames flowing under a sunset sky.

"Dost remember," Raleigh asked, leaning over the back of Spenser's chair, "at the time of the Desmond rebellion, when I first saw thee in Ireland,

Iris pleads in Distinguished Company

dost remember my sending with a guard to Cork a minstrel and a little child?"

"Yes; I remember it well, they came to me for the Lord Lieutenant's passport to take shipping for Bristol. The little one wore the amulet of the Geraldines about her neck, a small amber locket shaped like a bottle with Runic letters engraven thereon."

Raleigh turned to Robin again—"Have you ever seen such an amulet about the person of your foster-sister?"

"No; but I have heard them say that she had something round her neck when she was cast up by the sea."

He answered unwillingly. It seemed to him as if he was being forced to give evidence in support of a conspiracy which was to transfer the possession of Iris from those who had loved and nurtured her to the prisoner in the Gatehouse at Westminster, who had once refused to have anything to do with her.

Why, Robin wondered, should this question arise now after all these years? Why should Sir Walter and Dr. Dee and even Master Spenser suddenly be concerned about Iris's history? He resented it, and wished with all his heart that he had not countenanced, much less aided Iris in coming so impetuously to Durham House to plead for a Papist.

Iris pleads in Distinguished Company

When Iris reappeared and ascended the dais, her eyes had the wide, far-away look in them which made poor Robin feel that she was a being belonging to another world than the one in which he lived and moved. If he could have hated anything about her it was that look which seemed to detach her from her surroundings and himself.

Dr. Dee came slowly behind her, holding something like a miniature crystal globe in his hand, on the third finger of which he wore the astronomer's ring of brass presented to him by the King of Hungary. His long cream-coloured beard, parted in two strands, showed the diamond buttons set with rubies that fastened his gown of purple damask. There was a healthy flush on his hanging cheeks, which were smooth and downy as a peach, and though his figure and air were so venerable the fire of youth smouldered still in his keen little eyes. The Doctor's coach drawn by four horses and attended by as many lackeys, had been waiting for him some time in the outer courtyard to take him back to Mortlake, so with a courtly bow to Sir Walter and another to his guests he withdrew. Iris had come close to where Edmund Spenser sat, and now dropped on her knees before him.

"You are going home to my country on the morrow, Master Poet, then prythee take me with

Iris pleads in Distinguished Company

you. My mother's grave is there by the blue lake, high up in the dark hills. There she lieth, not at the bottom of the sea as I have sometimes thought might be, but buried in the fair green earth. Her hair is her shroud, and her hands are clasped on her breast. She looks as if she were sleeping, not as if she were dead; white as marble she lies there. Fain would I go to see her grave now I know where it is, and plant rue on it, and hear the banshee moan her dirge, so take me with you, sir, to the shores of Ireland, which is my country."

Tears had come into the beautiful eyes, and they shone like amethysts in a mist.

Master Spenser laid his thin transparent hand on the girl's dark hair. He might well have been perplexed at her appeal, but he showed no signs of it.

"My sweet maiden," said he, "thou art happier and safer in the land of thy adoption, than in the land of thy birth, which is in troth the saddest of all countries, with its blood-drenched soil, its thieves and wolves and fatal destiny. A most beautiful country as any under heaven, seamed with goodly rivers, sprinkled with many fair islands and lakes, its heavens mild and temperate, its woods full of princely timber. Yet for all its loveliness, 'tis a desolation; a home in Ireland is a home among ruins. There seemeth no reformation for that realm.

Iris pleads in Distinguished Company

Divers wise counsels for her good fail to prosper; whether it proceed from the very genius of the soil, or influence of the stars, or that God Almighty hath not yet appointed the time, or reserveth her in an unquiet state as a secret scourge for England, who can say; but so 'tis, that many who have had dealings with the country, fair as it may be, have wished it a sea-pool. Rest therefore here, dear maiden, in the land of sweet civility, for surely now thou wouldst not find there thy kinsfolk living."

The girl lifted her head quickly and looked not at Spenser but at Raleigh.

"Methinks my father may yet be alive," she said, in a less dreamy tone. "I have had no vision of him lying in a grave."

"If 'tis your mother, child, as you think and as I think 'tis, who lies in the grave beside the lake, then your father perished before her. He was slain with those rebels and their Spanish and Italian allies at the fortress of Orno, and being a chief, and known too sometime as the Red Pirate withal, his head was sent to adorn a stake in front of Dublin Castle."

Sir Walter spoke harshly with intent. Since Iris had become the confidante of the woman he loved, and dear to the gentle heart that was his, he had never met the glance of the Irish eyes without seeing a reproach in them, and the spectre of the butchered

Iris pleads in Distinguished Company

Red Chief rising out of the past, to recall a dark chapter in his life. He thought somehow to lay it now by thus bluntly confessing to her all he knew about the man he believed to have been her father. Iris rose from her knees and unclasped her hands.

"'Twas through you he was slain?" she asked.

"In warfare."

Perhaps he regretted that he could not with truth say "honourable warfare," for the rules of honour generally observed in war had indeed on that occasion been lamentably disregarded.

"Farewell, Master Spenser," said Iris, after a moment's silence. "You were right belike to bid me not seek my own country and kinsfolk. In troth I have had love and kindness enough here. Farewell."

There was still the wistful yearning in her eyes and voice, but she turned to Robin with a smile.

"'Tis growing late. Oh why, Robin, hast thou not reminded me that at eight of the clock 'tis my service to take to the Queen's closet her succory pottage?"

Her escort gladly accepted the undeserved reproach, for it showed that Iris had come back from the dead to the living and the common things of everyday life. To Robin what had passed had been a succession of exasperating riddles which his simple understanding could not attempt to fathom. He put it all down to Dr. Dee's conjuring tricks, and was

Iris pleads in Distinguished Company

inclined to believe that august wizard had temporarily bewitched not only Iris but Mr. Secretary Spenser and the Captain of the Guard as well.

The next day the poet was on his way back to his Irish home near the hills of Mole and Arlo, where in middle life he was to woo and wed the Elizabeth who consoled him for Rosalind the hopeless love of his youth, and to whom he wrote that exquisite wedding ode which is the most joyous lyrical outburst in the English language.

On the same day towards evening Gervase Vidal with his faithful henchman, Master Birch, was released from the Gatehouse at Westminster on condition that he returned forthwith to his estate in Devon, there to remain at Her Majesty's pleasure. The Queen knew that having once come under the surveillance of the terrible Master Topcliffe, he would be probably unmolested nowhere else.

Gervase believed that he owed his freedom entirely to the tardy intervention of Sir Walter Raleigh, till they came in sight of the Mount lying peacefully between the heather and the sea in the moonlight, when Master Birch told him of his letter to Iris. There were no rejoicings at the long-absent master's home-coming except among the animal pensioners, whose ranks had been thinned whilst he was away.

Iris pleads in Distinguished Company

The Dancer had pined so sorely for him, that he had laid him down one day and died, not for his country but of a broken heart. The zebra mouse had disappeared, and was supposed to have joined the unstriped majority of his species in the wainscotings, and no lame gull hobbled through the window at his call. Melpomene with majestically-elevated tail and purrs of profound content followed him to the laboratory, and saw that her master instead of striding directly to the crucible as of old, turned to look first at the old green cloak hanging on a nail behind the door, and then clasped his arms about it as if there had been some human form within its folds.

XXVII

A WINDY DAY AT GREENWICH

SPRING had come again and Sir Walter Raleigh's plans were ripe for a second buccaneering expedition to avenge his kinsman Sir Richard Grenville's death, to seize the Spanish treasure fleet and descend on Panama.

During the autumn and winter he had thrown himself passionately and recklessly into the preparations for this great coup, and had staked all he had on the enterprise. His violent invectives against the ambition of Spain in his "Report of the Truth of the Fight about the Isles of the Azores between the *Revenge* and an Armada of the King of Spain," had hit their mark, and so stirred up the old animus that capital flowed in. Thirteen fair ships supplied by adventurers lay in Chatham dockyard, and two men-of-war contributed by the Queen, the *Garland* and the *Foresight*, lay at Greenwich. The fleet under Raleigh's command was ready to start, but an unusually long spell of contrary winds delayed it. He was burning with impatience, for the longer he

A Windy Day at Greenwich

was detained the more the Queen was disposed to change her mind about letting him go, and already she began to talk of his yielding up the command to Frobisher. So engrossed had he been with the fitting out and manning of his fleet that the stolen meetings with his fair Elizabeth Throgmorton in gallery, garden or antechamber, for the most part aided and abetted by Robin on one side and Iris on the other, had been less frequent of late, yet frequent enough for the idle fops and sonnetteers of the Court who hated him to have got wind of them. Rumours were afloat which dismayed Robin, who by this time had learned to appear discreetly deaf when he heard most, and he had felt it his duty to warn his Captain more than once of what came to his ears as he stood on guard at entrances or stairways.

Sir Walter knew that he walked on the edge of a volcano. So far the Queen was in ignorance that report coupled the name of her favourite with that of her maid-of-honour, but any day she might be enlightened. Anxiety devoured him as he sat with her in her presence-chamber, or rode and walked at her side, and she tried to wheedle and coax him into relinquishing his charge of the expedition, the success of which he held to be of such vital importance to his prospects. He swore that he hated to leave her, but that it was for her sake he would

A Windy Day at Greenwich

go, to blazon the glory of her name on the high seas, to flout her foes, to pour fresh wealth into her lap. She believed him and smiled on him coquettishly, and little dreamed that the usual extravagant compliments flowed from even his "bold and plausible tongue" with difficulty, because dread of discovery hung like a sword of Damocles over his head. Would it fall before he sailed? At Chatham, in March, as he gazed at his noble ships waiting for the favourable breeze which fate perversely withheld, to spread their sails at his word of command, the thought of what delay might signify maddened and made for the moment a coward of him. He, the man of great intellect, chivalrous instincts and generous impulses, who had brought the ideals of the knight-errant of romance into practical life, who was to display a careless courage and splendid gallantry in many an adventure before he passed through Traitor's Gate to show that even in captivity he could still do things on a vaster scale than other men by writing his *History of the World*—this man was base enough now to give the lie direct to rumours of his marriage with a charming girl who made him the noblest and most devoted of wives till his long and chequered life came to its tragic end.

"I mean not to come away," he wrote to the

A Windy Day at Greenwich

Queen's Secretary, Robert Cecil, from Chatham, "as they say I will for fear of a marriage. If any such thing were, I would have imparted it to yourself before any man living, and therefore I pray believe it not, and I beseech you to suppress any such malicious report. For I protest before God there is none on the face of the earth I would be fastened to."

A sardonic smile doubtless flickered over the Secretary's gnome-like features when he read this explicit denial, for his memory would have been short indeed if he had forgotten how when he had come forth unexpectedly one day from an audience to fetch some papers that he had left on a table in the antechamber, he had seen, without being seen, the Captain of the Guard embracing Mistress Elizabeth, and had heard him murmur, "'Tis a hard lot when a man durst only kiss in secret his own fair wife."

"And who's to blame but himself that it must be done in secret?" Cecil had said to himself.

Westerly breezes continued to keep the fleet in port all through April. It was still there when the Queen went a-Maying with her maids in Greenwich Park, and brought down a stag and a doe with her own hand at Eltham. On the 18th day of the merry month, though the sky was grey and threatening and soft, scudding showers blew up from

A Windy Day at Greenwich

the west, Her Majesty repaired to a green, "very spacious and large, where thousands might stand and behold with good contentment the bear-baiting and bull-baiting, tempered with other lively disports." The same evening she dined publicly in state with the Danish and Russian envoys, and her good people of Greenwich flocked in large numbers into the hall of the palace to witness the gorgeous banquet at a distance. Amongst these awed onlookers was a pair of curly-headed, bronzed young seamen. One was to command a ship in Raleigh's detained fleet, and the other was proud enough of a subordinate position under the admiral himself on the *Roebuck*. Hal and Frank Fahe had fumed and chafed too at the "cross weather" which had held them port-bound since the first snowdrops and crocuses had pierced the brown earth, till now, when the trees were again in their full green glory, the fields gold with buttercups and the orchards a foam of pink and white. But this enforced lingering had given them the opportunity of beholding Iris gracing ruff and farthingale, and they held to their old opinion that so fair a jewel, no matter what the setting, must surpass all others for beauty and sweetness. And, now that the Court was at Greenwich, they had come to watch with the crowd their brother, whom giant that he was they were still inclined to regard as somewhat of a baby,

A Windy Day at Greenwich

moving about in his magnificent scarlet satin and gold lace, bearing goblets and silver-gilt dishes, bowing and scraping as if to the manner born. They smiled broadly at the sight, for to them it was the most entertaining feature of the show.

"I wonder what Rob thinks of his Captain being our admiral?" said Hal.

"He will not be envious," Frank answered. "He was not envious when Sir Walter sent for me to Durham House to recount to him what I had seen of Sir Richard Grenville's glorious fight last summer, when we, on the *George Noble* of London, hung on the lee of the *Revenge* and were near enough to hear Sir Richard shout, 'Save yourselves and leave me to my fortune.'"

"Nay, thou needst not recount it all over again now," interrupted Hal.

Frank was recalling the proudest day of his life, when in the presence of his own and his brothers' hero he had been not only suffered but bidden to talk for an hour on end, and Sir Walter had even jotted down his story on a sheet of paper.

The banquet was over, and the brothers had left the hall and were strolling arm-in-arm in the moist twilight on the terrace in front of the windows of the palace, when they paused and both exclaimed at once, "See, there is Sir Walter!"

A Windy Day at Greenwich

He was leaning on the casement looking out moodily at the tall and stately mast-heads of the *Roebuck*, *Foresight* and *Garland* rising into the grey mist now faintly tinged with rose. His reverie engaged him so deeply that he appeared not to see his two admirers, and they passed by without receiving, to their disappointment, a treasured greeting from him.

Was he thinking of how, early in his career, he had scratched on one of those window panes—

“Fain would I climb, but that I fear to fall,” and the Queen had come by and added, “If thy heart fail thee, do not climb at all”?

Verily with her encouragement his heart had not failed him, and he had swung himself upwards and soared from one success to another till he reached the topmost pinnacle of fame. But now he felt it tottering under his feet, and remembered Mad Moll’s prophecy about a tumble. That day the Queen had wrung a promise from him that if he could persuade the mariners to follow the unpopular Sir Martin Frobisher, he would merely bring them into the sea some threescore leagues and then not fail to return. But if only he could once set foot on deck and get out to sea, many things might arise to render that promise untenable.

So for the hundredth time he lamented the “cross

A Windy Day at Greenwich

weather," at which he had been heard to declare he was "more grieved than he ever was at anything in this world before." As he looked out on the grey and silent river and the great ships anchored there motionless, a vision of them, racing over the green bosom of the open sea with all their pearly sails fore and aft spread billowing above the brown shapely hulls, arose before his eyes to make theirs and his enforced activity a positive torture.

But two or three days later the wind changed to the right quarter. It came rioting, dry and boisterous from the East and shook the buds of May. It swirled the clouds across the sky, swept down the gilliflowers, and whistled and shrieked in the chimneys and key-holes. Queen Elizabeth detested windy weather; it neither became her age nor her style of dress. The wind sports lovingly with flowing draperies and yielding ribbons, but only buffets ferociously a barricade of stiffened ruff and padded gown even if sparkling with all the jewels of the Indies. Natural tresses may float picturesquely on the wings of the wind, but there is nothing picturesque about a wig awry. So the Queen, on the morning that the squadron had at last been ordered to put out to sea, resolved not to take the air at her usual hour. The bright sunshine, the blue sky, and the dry paths could not counterbalance the disad-

A Windy Day at Greenwich

vantage of being, as she expressed it, "blown to shreds."

"The Queen will not go out, because 'tis windy. Come to the wicket in the rose-garden at two of the clock, if thou wouldst take farewell of thine own true wife."

These hastily-scribbled lines were brought by Iris to Robin, who had got leave from the deputy Captain of the Guard to go to the river-side and drink a parting *aqua vitæ* at the inn, where the detained mariners and gentlemen-adventurers had been lodged, with his brother Frank, and to watch the vessels sail out of the Thames. Robin guessed before he received instructions that he was to deliver the note to Sir Walter. Whilst the Queen paced up and down one of the long galleries consoling herself for the departure of Raleigh by making merry over the epigrams of her saucy god-son Harington and listening to the gossip of Sir Fulke Greville, Elizabeth Throgmorton had made the excuse of a headache to absent herself from the royal presence, and had obtained Mistress Blanch Parry's permission to exercise herself in the gardens. Away she sped along the terrace down a flight of steps into the Dutch garden and across the yew-alley into another garden where grew Damask and Denmark roses, not yet in full bloom, deep crimson, faint pink and pure white, on stiff round bushes, or trailing

A Windy Day at Greenwich

their sweetness over high trellises. As she went the wind swept the spray from the fountains in her face, and loosened one by one her chestnut curls, caught her skirts and furled and unfurled them about her limbs. At the rendezvous she stood and waited, straight and graceful as a larch, with beating heart, soft eyes, and cheeks that burned hotly with expectation despite the biting breeze.

Sir Walter's first thoughts had been to disregard her summons. Surely it was madness to turn his face even for a few minutes again towards the Palace which he had quitted with such unbounded relief. His mood had instantly leapt from despondency to wildest exuberance at the seeming fulfilment of a long-deferred hope. He had gloried in his escape, and now to turn back might mean stumbling into the very volcano he had warily avoided. Yet he could not leave without one word of good-bye to the fair creature and gentle soul who had guarded their mutual secret so long and loyally, and borne herself with so brave a patience in the equivocal position in which she had been placed. So Sir Walter came by a grassy path from the river and climbed a rustic stairway of broken steps to the wicket-gate which led into the rose-garden.

He had scarcely entered when a sudden gust blew his high-crowned black velvet hat from his head and

A Windy Day at Greenwich

whirled it to the maid-of-honour's feet. She caught it and deftly fastened in its gold band one of the rose-buds she had been plucking to pass the time of waiting. As they met she replaced it on his dark locks which the wind mingled with hers.

"Thou mayst leave thy wife behind, but not thy hat," she said in playful reproach.

For answer he drew her to his heart and kissed the tears out of her eyes. Dalliance in the sunlit garden was sweet but fraught with danger, yet the restlessness of devouring ambition which had made life a torment during the last few months passed from him momentarily in the peaceful haven of his wife's arms.

Meanwhile the Queen had changed her mind about going out, for strong and masculine as that mind was supposed to be in the Councils of the State, it was very femininely subject to rapid changes in small affairs, as her attendants knew to their cost. It happened that Her Majesty had taken a short turn in the gallery when her old kinsman Lord Hunsdon appeared to pay his respects, and the Queen paused in her walk to give him her hand to kiss.

"You are wise, Madam," said the white-haired nobleman, as he rose from his knees, "to take exercise within doors to-day. The bright sunshine is treacherous, for the wind containeth an icy fang of a kind

A Windy Day at Greenwich

which when well stricken in years we cannot meet so stoutly as when young."

The Queen flushed angrily.

"Well stricken in years, forsooth!" she exclaimed. "I'll show you, my lord, 'tis not because of my years I mislike wind. Maids, don your veils or hoods, and bring me my mask and cloak. Beshrew me if I do not snap my fingers at my lord's 'icy fang,' and take the air after all in the rose-garden, which belike is more sheltered than the terraces."

"Madam, methinks the wind will be highest in the rose-garden," said Iris, who held the Queen's cloak.

"Why dost thou think so?"

"Because—because 'tis near the water."

"The wind bloweth not from the river, Mistress Fane, so you give a foolish reason. Come, we'll to the rose-garden."

Iris alone knew that Elizabeth Throgmorton had gone out to meet Sir Walter, so the Queen's decision filled her with alarm. She longed to warn her friend of the Queen's descent on the seclusion of the rose-garden, but knew not how it was to be done. Iris took her place among the maids-of-honour behind the Queen, as the procession stepped on to the terrace, in an agony of anxiety. Both the witticisms of her godson and the compliments of the courtiers who accom-

A Windy Day at Greenwich

panied her were literally cast to the winds, for the Queen heard nothing as she battled along the terrace clutching her head-gear with one hand and holding down her inflated garments with the other. Undaunted she steered the same course as Mistress Elizabeth had done half-an-hour earlier. When the yew-path was reached Iris made one more despairing effort to divert her from the fatal spot. She ran forward and placed herself so as to gain the left ear of the Queen, which heard best.

"Here, Madam, here, 'twixt these thick yews 'tis more sheltered; 'twere better for your Majesty to tarry in the yew-alley."

"Sdeath, maid! one would think that you were well stricken in years, as Lord Hunsdon hath put it, to hear you clamour to get out of the wind's way. I say, get out of mine."

Iris retreated, feeling all was lost unless Sir Walter had chanced to leave the garden before the Queen entered it. A moment later this would have happened, but as it was, the Queen advanced by the central path beneath the trellised arches which showered rose-petals before her, in time to witness a parting embrace between two figures at the other end of the garden, neither of whom she recognized immediately. Her sight like her hearing was not so good as it had been, and it was not till the man had passed through the

A Windy Day at Greenwich

wicket and was lost to view, and the woman after waving her hand turned and approached slowly with her tearful eyes bent on the ground, that the Queen saw that it was Elizabeth Throgmorton.

All unconscious that she was so soon to bear alone the full brunt of royal displeasure, she drew nearer with lagging not dancing steps now, and then hearing the sound of footsteps and voices coming towards her, she raised her eyes. She stood still at the sight of her mistress like a frightened fawn at bay. For a moment no one spoke, and there was a lull in the blustering breezes as if the very elements were abashed, and awaited breathlessly the tornado of queenly wrath.

"So this is how you seek a cure for headache, you deceitful, most shameless wench," cried the enraged Queen at last. "You whom I have held dear and in nearness to my person, for your father's sake, who was one of the faithfulest of my servants. Thus you repay me, by sneaking forth to trifle with secret lovers behind my back. Tell me, graceless hussy, who was it went from you just now? Speak, or I'll wring the skulking miscreant's name out of your throat even if I choke you withal."

The hapless maid-of-honour sank on her knees. Her hood of lilac taffetas slipped backwards and all the wind-swept curls fell about her in wild but

A Windy Day at Greenwich

beautiful dishevelment as she lifted her white, scared face and said huskily—

“’Twas Sir Walter Raleigh, Madam.”

The confession doubled the Queen’s anger. She was so violently incensed that for some moments she lost the power of speech altogether, but not of her hands, for she stooped and struck the offender crouching before her, first on one cheek, then on the other, leaving the marks of her rings on the delicate skin. Her companions appeared paralyzed with terror at the explosion, and unable to move or speak, though Harington was making mental notes of the scene and longed for a quill and a quiet corner to record it forthwith in one of his trenchant gossiping letters.

When the Queen spoke next she poured forth such a torrent of fierce abuse, that though her voice was pitched high enough to be heard above the wind, it so trembled with fury that most of her words were incoherent.

“You and the knave whom I have raised from beggarliness to wealth,” she ended, “have thought to fool me, but you both shall yet learn that I am not such a fool as to punish lightly your hole-and-corner light-o’-love-making. You will be put out of the coffer-room to-night, and leave my Court to-morrow, never to return.”

The Queen turned from her victim with a furious

A Windy Day at Greenwich

motion of the foot, which might have been a kick if Iris had not just then come forward and thrown herself passionately between the Queen and her greatly beloved friend.

"I cannot, nay cannot stand by in silence any longer. Your Majesty knoweth not all, or you would not so revile her. Is it such a crime that a loving wife should bid her lawful husband farewell before he goes to sea? Would you, great Majesty, if you were wed, hold it a sin to wish *your* husband Godspeed?"

The revelation that the pair who had so bitterly offended her were husband and wife by no means appeased the Virgin Queen's anger, as Iris had innocently expected, and her audacious suggestion of what her own conduct might have been in the case of her having committed the cardinal folly of marrying, sent her into even greater transports of jealous rage.

"Then you too have been mixed up in this disgraceful intrigue? Irish imp and foundling, now I understand your eagerness to keep me from coming hither to the rose-garden. I wash my hands of you too. Go with her, if you like, you are birds of a feather, but let me never see you more."

So saying, the Queen began to retrace her steps with vehement haste to the palace. It was fortunate that the wind had dropped, for in her agitation she had forgotten to hold her toppling headdress, and

A Windy Day at Greenwich

her wig had become perilously insecure, and showed the scant grey locks beneath.

Having meted out vengeance to her maid-of-honour, she withdrew to her private closet, to consider what punishment she should inflict on her knight-errant, who was already sailing gaily away towards Cape Finisterre.

XXVIII

HOW IRIS FOUND HER AMULET

THE disgraced maids-of-honour took refuge with good-natured Lady Bulkeley at Richmond. Here they stayed till the day in June when Sir Walter Raleigh was at the Queen's command brought back from sea and lodged in the Tower. Then Elizabeth Throgmorton—known since the disclosure in the rose-garden at Greenwich Palace as Lady Raleigh—went to share her husband's captivity, and Iris returned to her old home at the Manor in Devon.

She departed on the eve of the double wedding of Het and Cis to the twin sons of a wealthy merchant-knight in the city. Lady Bulkeley had decided that two birds in the hand were better than one in the bush, especially when the bush was a prison, Gervase Vidal lying in the Gatehouse at Westminster at the time of the betrothal. The Queen had graciously given her countenance to the happy event, and had been pleased to say that if the Court came to Richmond she would honour the interesting ceremony with her presence. A marriage when the bride and

How Iris found her Amulet

bridegroom were outside the pale of her household was not such a red rag to the Queen as were those alliances contracted by her favourites in secret in terror of her fierce resentment. She would tolerate and even dance at the nuptials of more ordinary subjects.

Iris was not pressed by her hostess to tarry for the wedding festivities, for the house began to fill to overflowing with the married daughters, their husbands, children and servants, and Iris was still too full of sorrow for her friend to be in any humour for feastings and maskings. If it had been possible she would gladly have gone to wait on her at the Tower, as Robin had gone to attend Sir Walter, having resigned for that purpose his post in the bodyguard. Robin was proud to exchange his scarlet tunic with the golden rose for a prosaic russet jerkin to serve his master in adversity. He quitted the gay scenes in which he had been a participator without a sigh, to be used in any capacity the late Captain of the Guard might choose to use him. True, he was too old in years and gigantic in stature for a page, too inexperienced for a valet, too indifferent a scribe for a secretary, yet he filled all three of these offices and many others at a pinch within the gloomy prison walls.

He had more command of pens and ink and spare time than ever before since he came to London, and

How Iris found her Amulet

diverted himself with the unusual occupation of writing letters home, the orthography of which was ingenious and original, but is here given in modern form.

“Methinks thou wouldst fain hear how it fareth here in the Tower,” he wrote to Iris, “with thy Lady Raleigh, but if the lady were at the North Pole instead of in this place I could not tell thee less, inasmuch as when the Queen’s Majesty did hear that she was come hither, she sendeth orders to the lieutenant that my Lady Raleigh should be confined alone in separate apartments from those that Sir Walter hath. So she be held in durance, but not in company of Sir W., which was her great desire. He is much vexed thereat. ‘Robin,’ saith he to me, ‘what trouble have I not caused that fair lady. Am I not a bad husband, for what good hath she had of me since the day you fetched at my behest my lord bishop and she joined her fortunes to mine? ’Twas done by stealth and so not well done. In sooth, if I deserve the penalty, she deserveth it not.’ And as he said this he seemed very sad and heavy in spirit withal, and methought ’twas the separation from his lady, her being so near and yet so far from him, was the chief cause of his pain. But an hour later he fell into a far greater extremity of grief, for he espied from the window the Queen’s barge passing by on the river and Her

How Iris found her Amulet

Majesty standing on the deck. Then he did stretch forth his arms and seem to wax mad with chagrin, saying 'twas the horrors of Tantalus to see his mistress thus and not to go to her. Aye, but he would go to her he vowed. And he made as if he would descend the stairway by the window, but Sir George Carew, that is his keeper, caught him by the sleeve and held him back and they struggled together.

"Sir Walter drew his dagger and tore Sir George's periwig from his head, and hath gotten his right arm so ill wrenched in the fray that he could not use it to write to Sir Robert Cecil, which, said he, must be done forthwith. So I writ for him what he told me to write, and 'twas all of the Queen, because Sir Robert will, Sir Walter greatly hopeth, read or show his letter to Her Majesty, and belike it will so greatly affect her to know how he groaneth in prison to be with her as was his wont, that she will have him set free. He would behold her riding and hunting like Diana, walking like Venus with her fair hair blowing about her pure cheeks, sitting in the shade like a goddess, playing on the lute like Orpheus. All this I writ at his bidding and more——"

At this point Iris, reading the boyish scrawl as she sat basking in the June sunshine, with her head resting against the basin of the little fountain in the pleasance at the Manor where she and Robin had first made

How Iris found her Amulet

friends, gave an impatient exclamation and dropped the letter on the grass. She thought of beautiful Elizabeth Raleigh's suffering and humiliation when the scolding Queen had so entirely lost her self-control as to use physical violence towards her, and felt indignant at the husband, who had left his wife to go through so painful an ordeal alone, thus quickly resuming the old pose of Queen's lover. Of course it had been a mock struggle at the prison window, got up in the hopes of impressing the Queen, just as the absurd flattery in the letter to Sir Robert Cecil was meant to mollify her; but for all that it seemed none the less contemptible to this girl of generous and independent soul.

Iris had not taken to heart her expulsion from Court, and was happy to be in the country again helping her foster-father to exercise hounds and hawks, and riding with him to old familiar places in the country round. The varied scenes of her life in the dazzling world of which the Queen was the centre, the moving from palace to palace, the progresses, the banquets, the going to theatre and church in state, the whirl of dancing, card-playing, and masks, all seemed like a dream to her this drowsy afternoon, as she lay in her white gown on the grass-plot, with her head resting against the basin of the fountain, looking up into the cloudless azure through the branches of

How Iris found her Amulet

Spanish chestnuts and sweet-scented limes. She could almost believe that except in imagination she had never been away, never as maid-of-honour to the Queen paced marble terraces and stately double avenues, wandered in mazes of cut yew and rare shrubs, and laurel alleys where gleamed white statues of goddesses, nymphs and fauns. She had beheld the world-famed horticultural wonders of Theobalds and Gorhambury, and in truth had seen most of the noblest and fairest gardens in the land, but none had seemed so dear to her eyes as this one, with its old red sunny walls and distant glimpses of the sea beyond rolling woods and meadows.

Every inch of it recalled happy hours spent in romps with her foster-brothers. In the fields on the other side of the fence, below the kitchen-garden, the haymakers were busy, the wenches in their shady hats tied under the chin singing ballads of Robin Hood as they plied their rakes. Often when she was still little Iris had delighted to bury Kit and Hal in the hay, and when older she and Robin had seriously undertaken each to make a haycock, and had found it much harder work than they had thought, producing something quite the wrong shape, which had to be demolished and rebuilt by more capable hands. Iris half wished in her present reminiscent dreamy mood that childhood could come back again. Her exaltation when tall

How Iris found her Amulet

handsome Kit used to pick her up and carry her to bed on his shoulder almost equalled her proud joy when she took her first gallop on the roan mare. Poor Kit, how wistfully he had looked at her as he said good-bye in the yard beneath the chestnuts that morning of the Armada summer when he set out with Hal for Plymouth, not to join his ship as he hoped, but to die of fever ashore. Had she known that it was the last time, Iris thought she would have given Kit more than one careless kiss.

The hum of the bees in the limes mingled with the hum of Doll's spinning-wheel which came from the projecting bay of the nursery above. Had Doll done nothing but spin, scold the maids, and mend the linen all the time Iris had been away doing and seeing new things every day? How odd it was to think that hundreds of people lived and died without coming within sound of the music of great London's many bells, without seeing the mighty bosom of Father Thames with all its life and movement, the Queen magnificent in her barge, or being carried through the lively streets in her gorgeous litter to a fanfare of trumpets. Iris smiled as she pictured what Doll's amazement would be if transported suddenly into the midst of London sights and sounds. The old nurse would find more to exclaim at even than when she pushed her way through the hurly-

How Iris found her Amulet

burly of Ottery fair at Martinmas, and her converse consisted entirely of ejaculations and chuckles. A red chubby arm pushed open a lattice of the great chamber window, which was nearer the porch than the bay, and Mercy Lane's face peered from a casement framed in jasmine and climbing roses.

"What are you doing there, Mercy?" Iris called out.

"Sorting the trunk of fine clothes thou hast brought home, Mistress Iris. The wardrobe won't hold 'em all, so methought the laces and night stuffs might be laid in these empty drawers, and some of the gowns and kirtles hung in the cupboards."

"I'll come and help you, Mercy. I have been lazy long enow," and Iris sprang to her feet, and the next minute had entered the shadowy room with the sombre tapestry hangings and the great carved bed in which the waif from the sea had lain her first two days and nights at the Manor. Only here and there a bar of sunlight pierced the duskiess of the low-roofed chamber, and Iris's white figure stood out in strong relief as the serving-woman turned from the window and said—

"'Tis a pity to bring you indoors, Mistress Iris. I did but go to the window to peep at you lying there asleep so prettily with your love-letter beside you."

"If I slept 'twas with my eyes open. As for the letter, 'tis from Robin."

How Iris found her Amulet

"Well, indeed ; I'll warrant Master Robin is now of an age and mind to write a love-letter to his lady love."

"But not to his sister," said Iris.

"There's no kinship of blood betwixt you," said Mercy with a broad smile stretching across her round rosy face.

Iris was looking at the garments with which Mercy had strewn the floor. There lay her gowns of taffetas and velvet, with the fringed kirtles and petticoats of brocade and satin to be worn beneath them in bright soft colours, French hoods and sarcenet mantles, a confusion of veils, caps, ruffs, lace aprons and kerchiefs, night-smocks delicately embroidered with black, a Flemish fashion much fancied by Queen Elizabeth ; "swete bags," fans, perfumed gloves, all of which Mercy, kneeling amidst them, folded and handled with a sort of awed caress and sighs of admiring wonder as she put them in the deep drawers.

What stories all this bravery could tell, thought Iris, if it could speak. And once more she looked back on her life at the Bulkeley's and at Court as if it had been a dream, or a very long exciting play of a hundred acts instead of three in which she had played a part. Now the curtain had fallen, and the lights were extinguished, and she had stepped off the stage to be herself again. Herself? The old uncertainty about that self which came on Iris occasionally

How Iris found her Amulet

took possession of her at this moment. Her eyes wandered to the carven shelf above the chest of drawers where Mercy had ranged a comfit and powder-box and a few loose trinkets.

"What are these, Mercy? I have never seen them before." She put out her hand and took up a little dull silver crucifix and an amber charm which hung tied together on a slender rough chain of copper.

"Methinks you have seen them, Mistress Iris, though it's so long ago you have forgot. I went just now to the nursery bureau thinking there might be room for some of this finery in the top long drawer, but 'twas full of dead Mistress Fane's clothes, and then these gewgaws caught my eye that they took from your neck the day of the wreck and tossed in there. I took them out, for meseemeth 'tis time you should have them again. Not but that they are poor scrubby things," added Mercy, "compared with the divers fair pearls and jewels thou hast been wearing at the Court."

"More precious than any. This—this," she said, detaching the amber bottle from the crucifix—"this is an amulet, and was hung round my neck, I warrant at birth. I tell you, Mercy, 'twas wrong that any should have laid hands on it to take it from me—very wrong."

How Iris found her Amulet

"'Twas Mrs. Doll and the housekeeper's doing," Mercy explained.

Iris examined the roughly-modelled piece of amber with ever-growing interest.

"That is why I cried. I missed it. Nay, but it and I shall never be parted more."

She went to the window and held it up so that the hot sunlight streamed through it and illumined the strange devices and incomprehensible letters engraven on the outside. Within she could read quite clearly a name written on a shred of parchment—the name of Eileen.

So all these years they might have known her name at least, thought she, for she hadn't a doubt that she was Eileen. She fastened the amulet to the slender gold chain she wore, a New-Year's gift from the Queen's Lady of the Bedchamber, and slipped it beneath the open square of her bodice. As it touched her bosom a wave of vague intangible memories surged through her. She moved slowly, with fixed star-like eyes, to the door and descended the staircase.

XXIX

THE OLD GREEN CLOAK AGAIN

THERE were voices in the hall.

The Esquire from habit stood leaning against the carved greyhounds above the chimney-piece, though green boughs instead of burning logs filled the hearth, and beside him was one who had now set foot for the first time in the home of his ancestors' enemies.

Iris as she drew near, still with the fixed, far-seeing expression in her eyes, showed no signs of surprise at the sight of Gervase Vidal, neither did it seem to strike her as remarkable that he should come forward to meet her with the new name on his lips.

"Eileen, you may come with me now," he said ;
"Mr. Fane will consent."

"I have found my amulet. Is that why?" she asked, pressing her hand over the place where it lay against her skin. "Father, I have found it!"

"Aye, child, you have found too something of greater import," Christopher said. "A brother—not another foster-brother, but one who hath the same blood in his veins as your own. Sir Gervase

The Old Green Cloak Again

hath come hither to tell me how he hath discovered written evidence that you and he were born of the same mother, and if that doth not suffice, he believes that Sir Walter Raleigh, having met with his mother in Ireland, can bear witness to the truth of it."

He paused to see how she was affected by the revelation, but she displayed no more emotion than if she had been told something that she had expected to hear. So the Esquire went on.

"Thou knowest, and all the world knows, how Sir Gervase mourned for his parents, year out and year in, thinking both were drowned, but 'twas only his father who met that hapless fate; his fair lady, whom he struggled to keep afloat till he sank with exhaustion, was saved. Saved by your father, O'Gorman Geraldine, who took her on his ship, a craft better seasoned to be tossed by the tempest than Sir Gervase Vidal's tiny skiff. He held her a captive by sea and land, and was so enamoured of his fair prisoner that he would not seek a ransom for her; and so it happened that, in despair of escape and in dread of a worse fate, she did finally wed with him, and did bear him a maid, the little Eily who was put out to nurse, and in those troublous times of bloodshed and rebellion, in which her father lost his life, came to the coast under the care of an old blind harper, and, like her mother, was cast away at

The Old Green Cloak Again

sea, and would have perished had not a special Providence washed her ashore here near the very spot where Lady Vidal set sail with her husband for an afternoon's pleasure never to come back. But this part of the story you know, and the rest Sir Gervase hath related to me, writ in papers that have come into his hands—how he would fain tell you himself. So go with him now, dear wench; he hath indeed a stronger claim to thee than we have ever dreamed."

"'Tis passing strange," said Iris, "yet to me it seemeth not too strange to be true."

Then with a sudden revulsion of feeling her composure vanished. She dropped on her knees before her foster-father, and catching his big brown hand in her small white ones, kissed it over and over again.

"Most dear and kind father, I shall still need—aye, always need—a father, however rich I may be in brothers. Say, sweet sir, that you will ever be the father you have been to your grateful and loving daughter."

"Need you ask," Christopher answered, lifting her up and holding her in his arms. "Am I not Robin's father?"

"I will go with Gervase now, but come back to you before night," Iris said.

The Old Green Cloak Again

"Come," she went on, turning to her brother. "Come, we will go together up to the dark mountains to the little blue lake where my—our mother lies buried."

"Yes, in spirit we will go there," he replied, his dark eyes gazing dreamily into hers.

He accepted with a passionless serenity and grave joy the relationship that he had discovered between himself and the girl who, when once he had awakened to her existence, had exercised whether present or absent a strange fascination over him. The fires of passion in his nature had burned low in cherishing into manhood the sorrow of his youth, and in pursuit of the philosopher's stone, the eternal chimera which so many great minds in that age had till death never relinquished the hope of grasping. Thus it was easier for him than it might have been for other men to welcome the tie of blood as a strengthening of the spiritual link between himself and Iris.

Hand in hand they went out into the golden landscape, and the villagers and fisher-folk who chanced to see them as they took their way towards the Mount, gazed in open-mouthed astonishment at the darkly-clad figure of Sir Gervase and the maid from the Manor radiant in white beside him, for never had the recluse been seen outside his demesne in

The Old Green Cloak Again

fair lady's company since as a boy he came down to the shore clinging to his young mother's arm.

The dark fishing-smacks dotted the turquoise sea which melted into the sky without a ripple. When they had climbed the flag-staff hill, brother and sister stood and gazed down on the little cove with its glistening white pebbles at the foot of the steep red cliff. Scarcely a breath stirred the sea-pinks and grasses, and no song of birds broke the silence. For a long time neither spoke. Slowly their eyes wandered from the spot fraught for them with such extraordinary interest and poignant memories, and looked away to the horizon. And as they looked, both saw what only the eye of the visionary can see. Silvery spires, shining minaret and pinnacle rose one by one out of the rainbow haze of mirage, till there between sea and sky towered a city of dreams with aërial gates and walls of mother-of-pearl.

"You see it, dear," said Gervase; "that is the city into whose streets you and I have the passport. Beyond are the vast fields of story and romance, where you with your real brother may wander and meet the shades of the great kings and queens, princes and heroes amongst men, whose names live for ever in history and in the immortal works of the poets of all ages. Fairer this, methinks, than riding with your foster-brothers over the fields of

The Old Green Cloak Again

this material world on the track of a poor fox or stag."

"'Twas beautiful! But see, now it hath faded quite away. Such visions cannot last. You spoke of the material world, and it melted," said Iris regretfully. Then once more there swept through her Celtic blood the old craving for her native soil.

"Nay, 'tis not in your dream-cities and fields of story after all that I fainest would wander, but in my own dear country—my father's country, for which he died. Take me thither."

"This was writ in that country. When thou hast read all thou wilt feel that thou hast been there again," Gervase said, drawing from his doublet a flat packet enclosed in covers of bog-wood, with metal edges and fastening. The sheets within were stained and in places blurred with damp. It had taken Gervase long to decipher his mother's letters—letters for the most part written to beguile the long, lonely hours in dreary castles hidden amidst the wild hills, where her captor and lover confined her when he was roving the seas in his ship with the blood-red sails or stirring up the rebels. In them she told of how soon she had despaired of ever sending tidings of her escape to the boy who she knew would be so passionately mourning for her as dead, yet she went on writing the letters which she was never able to send,

The Old Green Cloak Again

for even after her marriage her handsome lord, though he showed her every tenderness and affection in his fierce way, was obdurate on this point. Thus the unsent letters had grown to be chapters of a story, a sort of journal of her life in Ireland. She recorded the birth, on the eve of St. Agnes, of her daughter Eileen in one letter; and in another lamented bitterly that the child had been taken from her breast to be nursed in a peasant family, according to the custom in Ireland, so that when she returned she lisped no English word in her baby prattle. The last lines written by the lady whose fate had been so singular came first in the packet.

"I, Marie, the widow of Sir Gervase Vidal, Knight, of Vidal's Mount, near Saltern, in the county of Devon, and now the widow of the chief, O'Gorman Geraldine, entrust these papers to my late husband's faithful harper, Kormack Malone, and charge him when he hath opportunity to deliver them to my dear son, Gervase Vidal, who for this seven years hath held me dead. And I commend to his care and love his orphan sister that I did bear my second husband, O'Gorman Geraldine, for in this perilous country, so torn by civil violence and bloody strife, there is truly no safe place of abiding for one of her race. May the rest of her sweet days be passed in pleasant places far from this unhappy land of misrule. Captain Ralegh,

The Old Green Cloak Again

of the English Horse, in return for a service rendered him, sendeth a guard with her to the coast. These are the dying wishes and commands of one who is sick unto death."

The handwriting in the older letters beneath was firm and full of bold, curious flourishes, but here, on this frail sheet, which served as a pathetic preface to the rest, it was weak and faltering. As Iris read it, leaning on her brother's shoulder, tears filled her eyes. When she came to the name Kormack Malone she read it aloud, and Gervase recognized it as the name he had heard her cry repeatedly above the roar of the stream when he snatched her from death in the ravine.

"Methinks I must have been more with Kormack Malone than with my father and mother," said Iris. "'Tis not they that come back to me, but Kormack. I can hear again his strange, shrill songs and the music of his harp, so sad and sweet. Aye, I can remember playing with his long beard, and plunging my tiny hands into the great pockets of his wide old cloak, to see what I could find in them when I crept under it to play at house."

"That old cloak hath performed wonders, in troth," Gervase said. "With you it survived the shipwreck, and hath been the means of long preserving and then revealing a wondrous secret. Eileen, sweet sister,

The Old Green Cloak Again

thou must bequeath it to thy children and children's children."

"'Tis thine to bequeath," she said, looking up into his face, and noticing for the first time how careworn it was and aged beyond his years, and how many silver threads showed in the blackness of his hair.

He shook his head.

"I shall never wed," he said. "Were it not too late, the world hath contained only two women for me—first, my mother, and then, my sister."

"But tell me how and where you found these precious letters at last?" Iris asked, as they turned from the sea and walked over the bracken and furze to the Mount, the towers of which glowed in the westering light.

"I found them in the old green cloak. Years ago, not long after the wreck, Moll Scadding warned me that its folds contained a secret that concerned me, but I heeded her not. When you lay in my turret-chamber and I sent for her to nurse you, she brought the cloak with her as you know, and I saw that contact with it kindled in you powers of vision and conjured up scenes that had nothing to do with the life you had lived with the Fanes at the Manor. After you had recovered and gone back to that manner of life, I cherished it and held it as a dear relic of you, and a remembrance of those days in

The Old Green Cloak Again

which we had communed together. I longed to understand why it was that when the cloak was about your shoulders you seemed to know my mother's face in her portrait, which had once too so strangely arrested Sir Walter Raleigh, and why, though unlike in all other features, your mouth recalled hers to me when you smiled. So I journeyed to London to consult the great Dr. Dee, and when I was released, thanks to your sweet intercession, from my durance, which had proved how empty was the honour Her Majesty had so lately conferred on me, I came home and searched again in all the pockets of the cloak and beneath the lining, but discovered nothing till Melpomene gave me the clue."

"The yellow cat!" exclaimed Iris.

"She hath a habit of concealing her kittens in odd corners, and the other day hid one in the cloak. The mew of the kitten guided my hand to the patch on the back which I had never thought to examine, and I found that in the folds beneath it was another invisible pocket, and therein lay the kitten and this light package of such surpassing value and wondrous significance for us, Eileen."

"Wondrous indeed, yet more wondrous than anything else, meseemeth, is that the mystery which hath baffled the wise woman Moll and the mighty Dr. Dee should have been solved by a cat."

The Old Green Cloak Again

"Melpomene is in possession of wisdom that passes that of many men. When she departs this life I will offer up prayers for her soul, that it may rest for ever in the Paradise whither all good animals go."

They had come by a side entrance to the front of the castellated part of the house, which cast its long shadows across the mossgrown flagstones of the courtyard. A wood-pigeon cooed, and the muffled tinkle of the chapel bell ringing for vespers fell on the still evening air. The bent, spare figure of the aged priest and Master Birch's rotund form came forth from the shadows into the sunlight on their way to chapel. Sir Gervase drew his sister towards them.

"Father, give Eileen, give us thy blessing," he said.

The white-robed girl kneeled beside Gervase on the flagstones, and the palsied hand rested on each of their heads in turn as the old man murmured a benedicite.

When Gervase rose he crossed himself and followed Father Bell and Master Birch to the chapel, but Iris turned alone into the house. She drew the amulet from her bosom and looked at it intently, as with slow steps she passed through the stone hall to the library. For the first time she thought of the crucifix she had detached from the amulet, and what it meant. She realized that she had been born to the same religion as

The Old Green Cloak Again

her half-brother, the "old religion" as people called it, for which her unhappy country bled, yet on this point she and Gervase could never be at union. The first instincts of devotion that she remembered had been awakened at Doll's knee and in the chancel of Budleigh Church, and had been quickened while she served the Queen in hearing the Anglican services melodiously said and sung by "Her Majesty's children of the Chapels Royal," so that the faith in which she had been brought up had become dear to Iris and a part of her. If her half-brother expected or hoped that she would renounce it and return to his, he would be disappointed. This fear of a breach between them on the question which bred so much bitterness and strife in the nation, and led to fanaticism, persecutions and martyrdoms, saddened the girl for a moment in the midst of her new-found happiness. She had come to the picture, and as she glanced up gravely in her meditations she met the dancing blue eyes of her own and Gervase's mother. Again, as when Sir Walter Raleigh had stood spellbound before it, the full brilliance of the midsummer evening sunlight was upon it, investing with life and grace the lady's charming figure in its rich and jewelled raiment.

"Mother, your Eily is safe. Have you known how marvellously God preserved her—not once, but twice? And her life hath been passed in pleasant

The Old Green Cloak Again

places. Yea, very pleasant places, as you so wished."

A cloud seemed to fall suddenly on the canvas and chase the sunshine away. The lady's lips lost their careless smiling curves, and grew set and sad, the eyes became hollow and strained. Instead of the timid, shrinking boy in a silver-grey jerkin and tight ruff and little dagger at his girdle, a small, wild black-haired girl, with naked feet and heavy bracelets on her wrists, held the lady's hand. And on the other side of her there was no fair-haired, fresh-complexioned English squire, but only the bleeding head of a man, a man fierce and dark, but beautiful as a god, with blue flashes in the black depths of his eyes and scarlet plumes nodding in the casque above his raven locks.

"Father," Iris cried—"father!" and covered her face with her hands.

XXX

THE MADRE DI DIOS

IN the September of that year all the world and his wife in Devon were again flocking to Dartmouth. Sir Walter Raleigh's good ship *Roebuck*, from which he had been so summarily recalled, had distinguished herself and redeemed the whole expedition from failure by capturing the great carrack *Madre di Dios*, which with its fabulous cargo of spices, musk, and precious stones, worth 40,000 cruzadoes, was the richest prize ever brought to England.

The Queen sent her secretary, Sir Robert Cecil, to stop the pilfering of the spoils, but before he arrived at Dartmouth some of the sailors had filled their pockets and trunks with treasure. A Saltern mariner brought in his baggage to his humble home "a chain of orient pearls, two chains of gold, four great pearls of the bigness of a fair pea, four forks of crystal, four spoons of crystal set with gold and stones, and two cords of musk"—booty which would have scandalized old Dan Scadding had he been alive to see and hear of it ; but Moll had buried her father, and now lived

The Madre di Dios

alone in the cottage above the cove, and was said to be dafter and more uncanny in her habits than ever. She had hovered constantly about the Mount since its master had discovered his relationship with the maid of the Manor. Sometimes she met them in their walks, or looked in upon them through the oriel where they passed many hours in music and reading ; and Moll shook her head, muttering, " 'Tis pity it came not sooner, for now it will be short-lived happiness. Fate, fate, I see it coming ; not drowning this time, but burning."

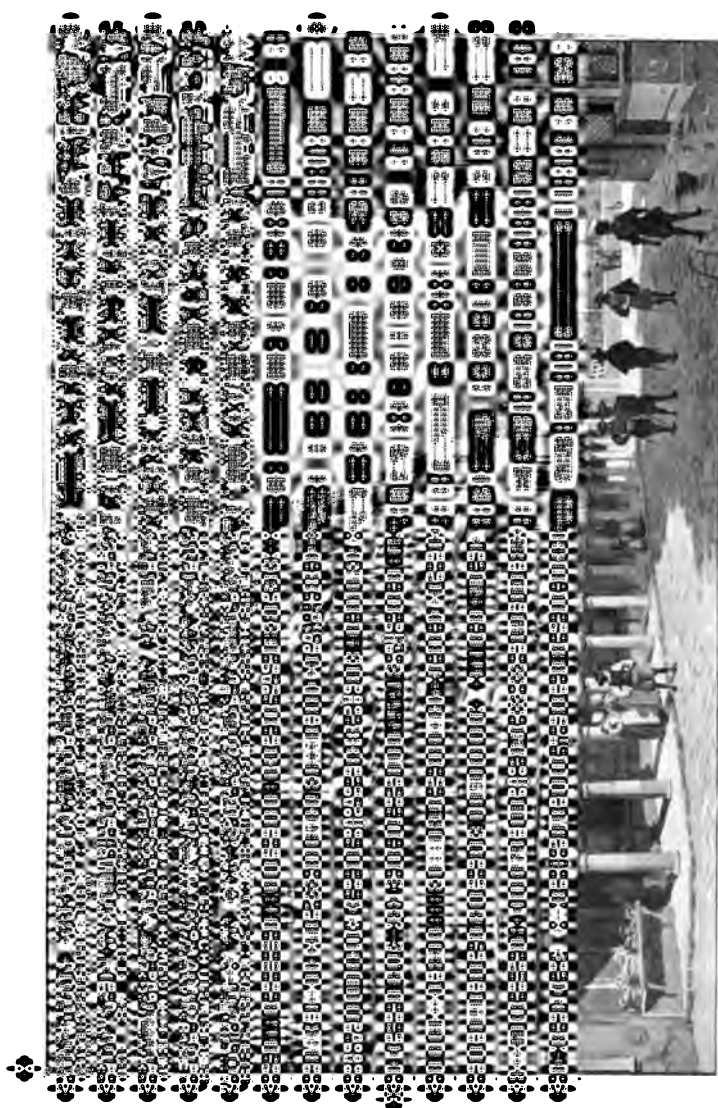
Iris was still the maid of the Manor, though she spent most of her days with Gervase, and when the news came that her foster-brothers, Hal and Frank Fane, had arrived at Dartmouth with the great car-rack, and Robin was coming there with Sir Walter Raleigh, she looked forward to bringing them and her half-brother together in a joyful meeting of reconciliation, in which the tradition of an ancient feud would be wiped out and forgotten. Now they should know their "ogre" of old days in his true character, the quiet student of refined and scholarly taste, none the less a brave gentleman because he was untouched by the fever of the times for fight and plunder. Robin should not be jealous any more.

Sir Gervase was even persuaded by Iris to talk of a banquet to be held at Michaelmas in the great hall of

The Madre di Dios

his house, at which all the Fanes should be present, and she should take Master Birch's place opposite Gervase, with the Esquire on her right hand and Sir Walter on Gervase's. Iris planned that after the event she would not go back to the Manor to live, happy home as it had been, but that she would take up her rightful position as mistress of her brother's curious household and engage women servants. She had consulted Doll about the hiring of these the bright morning that she arrayed herself in her velvet riding-suit and cap to take horse with her foster-father to Exeter, thence to Dartmouth on the morrow, to meet the Esquire's sons and to behold the *Madre di Dios*, of which the whole country was talking.

Some of its "bags of seed pearls and rubies" had found their way into the old cathedral city, and the inhabitants had not been disposed to reveal to Sir Robert Cecil where they lay hid. "By my rough dealing with them," wrote the Secretary, "I have made an impression with the mayor and the rest. I have given orders to search every bag and mail coming from the West for jewels, pearls, and amber, and though I fear the birds be flown, yet will I not doubt to save Her Majesty that which shall be worth my journey. Her Majesty's captive comes after me, but I have outrid him and will be at Dartmouth before him."



THE SPANISH GALLEON AT DARTMOUTH.

1897
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

The Madre di Dios

Her Majesty's captive, Sir Walter Raleigh, had been released from his prison in the Tower to go down to the West to settle the distribution of the treasure. He was still nominally a prisoner, and called himself the "Queen of England's poor captive" with a "pensive air." Nevertheless, he rode into the picturesque hilly little town on the green waters of the Dart with a large and splendid retinue. From the bow-window of the inn which opened on the crooked street running down to the harbour Christopher Fane and Iris watched him standing amongst the mariners who flocked round their liberated admiral with shouts of joy and tears of emotion. When he so willed, none knew better than he how to excite the enthusiasm of poor seamen, though as a rule he held, like Coriolanus, the multitude and its opinion in bitter scorn. Now as he looked at the carrack towering into the blue sky against a background of woods touched with the crimson, orange and brown of their early autumn glory, and then at the ardent, upturned faces around him, a light leapt up in his eye. He shook off depression and vaulted once more into the arena of ambitious dreams and hopes. These men were so devoted he might count on them surely to follow him whithersoever he led them, over unsailed seas, to untrodden coasts, by the crystal waters of the vast Orinoco, through virgin forests to the mountains of glittering

The Madre di Dios

quartz and marble in whose heart, according to Spanish fable, lay the magic region of El Dorado, Manoa the golden city, "where all the houses and furniture thereof, and of the gardens, were of pure solid gold." If he found this fountain of wealth, richer than all the other countries of the world put together, if he added this to Elizabeth's dominions, he must regain his old position in her favour and affection, and be forgiven by his Queen for his "brutish offence," as Cecil, his hollow friend, termed his marriage.

Delusive dream, vain vision, that as the years went on rose again and again to lure him to his ruin, and lead to that final fall of which the wise woman had warned him.

With a sinister smile the hunch-backed Secretary stood by, and was a spectator of the scene on the quay at Dartmouth, and afterwards went into the inn to record it in his correspondence.

Sir Walter made his escape there too from the sailors at last, and as he came beneath the window Iris followed him with her eyes as if fascinated. Since she had seen him last she had learned clearly from the recovered letters the story of how and where Captain Raleigh's path in life had crossed her mother's and her own, and he knew from Robin that the relationship he had more than expected to exist between

The Madre di Dios

the girl and Sir Gervase Vidal had been proved, but in prison, engaged in despondent meditation and chafing under his restraint, he had paid little heed to it. Now, when he caught sight of Iris's face in the window, he smiled and determined to seek out her and the Esquire at once and make his congratulations.

The Irish eyes were no longer a mystery, yet as he came into the inn parlour with Robin, who had joined him in the courtyard, he was struck by their depth of tragic melancholy. Suddenly there arose between him and her the wild dark head crowned with black curls and blood-red plumes which Iris had seen appear beside her mother in the picture. They both saw it now. But it was only for the flash of a moment. It vanished at the sound of Christopher's hearty greeting to his boy.

Iris asked Sir Walter how his dear lady fared.

"The day I quitted the Tower she exchanged her apartments there for Durham House," he said. "She hath been sorely tried, but beareth herself with cheerful courage. Methinks she would fain enjoy the companionship again of the fair friend whom she doth hold in such fondness. Will you come, Mistress Iris, and be her right hand as good Robin there is mine?"

"I should gladly do so, sir, were I not going this Michaelmas, with my father's consent, to tarry with

The Madre di Dios

my brother, Sir Gervase Vidal, to keep his house and share his studies."

She made the announcement in the presence of the three foster-brothers, for Captain Hal and Frank Fane, wearing their blue watchet, had come into the room and stood with Robin and their father in the window. A fine group they were for comeliness and manly vigour.

"'Tis true," said Sir Walter, "Sir Gervase's claim on your company holds good above all others now. Belike you will teach him, in Kit Marlowe's words, 'to cast the scholar off' somewhat, and learn 'to court it like a gentleman,' and be 'proud, bold, and resolute.'"

"Nay, sir," Iris answered, "I am well satisfied with my brother as he is, and would not change his manner of life, only brighten it."

A cloud descended on the three open countenances of her foster-brothers as the girl they had so long worshipped, with head held high, flushed cheeks, and flashing eyes, spoke in loyal defence of the brother who had been a stranger to her when they had been her playmates and devoted boy-champions. They were not used yet to the new situation, and could not accustom themselves at once to hearing that there was no room for improvement in a Vidal.

Iris divined their thoughts. She turned to them

The Madre di Dios

with the corners of her mouth dimpling in the smile they knew and loved so well, and said—

“You are all coming with me to the Mount at Michaelmas. I am going to introduce my brothers to another brother whom they have never known, and when they do know him they will assuredly not mind giving him their sister and his sister for a while, till, till——”

She broke off and looked at Robin. It was to him that she held out her hands, and the others understood. “Poor Kit, would he could be there too,” she murmured.

“Boy, I vow I’ll come to thy wedding,” Sir Walter said, laughing, “as thou wert the only guest at mine.” Then he added, “Mr. Fane, your sons are a fine stock, and you may take much credit to yourself for them. The untimely death of the elder was infinitely to be deplored, for he was of the stuff that good colonists are made of. If all had been like him, Virginia would have been planted and cultivated with patience, and Her Majesty’s new empire overseas would have borne fine vintages and harvests which in the end would have brought more lasting wealth than hasty snatchings of gold and silver. But with the majority gold is the only bait that draws, and I must use the bait. Would to God ’twere otherwise. Now I must get me to my task of making four divisions of the

The Madre di Dios

spoils yonder, and see to it that the Queen hath the lion's share. I warrant I shall not have to force pearls and diamonds on any unless it be on these two modest gentlemen, your sons, who have ever been as forward in their services as they have been slow in claiming afterwards what is their due in prizes."

Having made a proud father even prouder by these words of appreciation of his boys, Raleigh left them, but not without a promise that before he departed for London from the present mission to the West he would visit them at Budleigh and pick up his faithful Robin.

So Robin accompanied the merry party that rode forth the next day, leaving behind them the quaint terraced town still gay with flags and bunting and agog with excitement about the great Mother of God in its harbour. Bells clanged from the old church on the hill, and in every inn blue-eyed, blue-clad English mariners and dark-skinned Portuguese sailors were being fêted by the townsfolk, while streams of country people in holiday clothes jostled against gallants in velvet cloaks, and at the street corners all the talk was of doubloons, diamonds the size of eggs, of matchless emeralds, and of such pearls and rubies as had never before been seen.

The brothers were happy at being together again. On that long homeward ride through the sunshine

The Madre di Dios

of an Indian summer which vied with the real summer in brilliance, it was Frank, as always, who talked the most ; though Robin considered he had more to tell, for if he had not been to sea and boarded carracks he had helped to make the Queen's bed (the endless details of which extraordinary performance he was reserving for the edification of Doll and Mercy), and owing to his nearness to the Captain of the Guard, he was familiar with the inside of Her Majesty's greatest prison as well as that of her fairest palaces.

Iris rode by each in turn, and when they were in the open country showed them that she had not forgotten how to clear a fence or a Dartmoor stone wall like a bird. In the high lanes she drew down with her whip sprays of reddening sloeberries, nuts, and traveller's joy, and as of old Robin took off her cap and decked her dark hair with autumn leaves.

At Exeter they tarried at the hostel and went to prayers in the Cathedral, where beneath the noble gothic roof the simple country gentleman in russet doublet and hose knelt to give thanks for the safe deliverance once more of his sailor sons from perils on the sea.

XXXI

CLEANSING FIRES

As they came out of the Cathedral hostel to take horse again, Iris noticed two sour-visaged persons looking up at the sculptured figures of saints and bishops on the façade of the great minster, and heard one say to the other, "Pile of superstition—'twere well to level all such with the ground."

"As by this time methinks the house and chapel of our Papist gentleman on whom we called this morning may be level," was the answer.

Iris looked back at the speakers from her horse, thinking she had seen the face of one before, and wondering where ; but before she could decide they were lost to sight in the stream of people, many of them strangers on their way to Dartmouth, passing to and fro in front of the Cathedral.

The errand of Master Topcliffe (for he it was whom Iris had seen before on the river-bank at Richmond) and his companion into Devonshire had not been to visit the *Madre di Dios* in Dartmouth harbour, but the suspected houses of Catholic gentry, Sir

Cleansing Fires

Gervase Vidal's among them. At the Mount they had found no concealed Jesuit or Jesuitical literature, and had been obliged to content themselves with removing a figure of the Virgin from the chapel to the stable, where they had set fire to it and taken their departure. When from a distance they had beheld the flames spreading they knew that they had done more mischief than they had intended, but were not at all disturbed in their minds on that account, and had pursued their way calmly back to Exeter.

Iris little thought to whom the remark she had overheard outside the Cathedral referred, and had forgotten it by the time they had begun the ascent of the hill from the summit of which the grey towers of Vidal's Mount would first come in sight, showing above their bower of foliage outlined against the sea. The girl was looking out eagerly for the first view of the old house which once she was wont to regard as some enchanted habitation wrapped in mystery. Even now she could scarcely realize that it was to be her home, and that the next time she passed under its great gateway it would be to stay, and the country people would have to learn to call her the maid of the Mount instead of the maid of the Manor.

The moon and Jupiter had risen in the clear

Cleansing Fires

evening sky, and Iris pictured Sir Gervase standing on the pavilion, watching the heavens in his habitual rapt attitude of aloofness from earthly interests. A sudden idea struck her. She drew rein and said to her fellow-horsemen: "We are all together, so let us not pass by his gates this evening, but go in at once, surprising him at his star-gazing. 'Tis well not to wait till Michaelmas, after all. Then he will be prepared as for a ceremony, and I would fain have nought of ceremonious stiffness when my brother's hand clasps the hands of my foster-brothers. Taken by surprise, he will be himself, his dear self as I know him, but as you do not. I would not have the meeting delayed. Who can say what might happen ere Michaelmas, even ere to-morrow cometh? 'Be reconciled with him quickly, now thou art in the way with him.' Those words from the Bible are in my ears; why I cannot say, for in truth there is not, and never hath been any real cause of enmity 'twixt you and him. 'Twas fancied, not real. But that is not enough, you must be drawn to each other in love and fellowship by me, his sister and yours. So come now."

There was an irresistible appeal in the tones of her voice. The silvery moonbeams fell on her face till it shone with an almost ethereal lustre. Her mouth curved in a smile, but the great eyes

Cleansing Fires

had not lost their strange deep sadness. She was so passing fair, gaiety and gravity, strength and gentleness were so curiously mingled in her, that to the three Fanes, as she had been to the four, she was still peerless among maidens. At her bidding they would have galloped gladly into the middle of the sea or to the end of the earth. How often had they longed for her sake to fight the Vidal wolf, to wrest her from him at the sword's point if ever he should dare to make good his claim to possess her. But now they were ready to lie down like lambs in his lair because she wished it.

"What do you say, lads," said Christopher. "Is it wise not to put off till to-morrow what can be done to-day?"

"'Tis wise. She is right," said Hal, speaking for all. "We will come to-night to the Mount."

They rode forward abreast, being on the open heather, to the crest of the hill. Then Iris drew up again, this time with a sharp cry. Where the white road into which they were about to turn ascended again on the other side of the valley, the stately gatehouse of Vidal's Mount cast its shadow as usual, but amidst the trees in the park beyond instead of grey towers there rose a column of dense smoke, blackening the pale sky, as it spread towards the sea. A lurid glare illuminated the trunks of

Cleansing Fires

oaks and beeches, and through their vistas was to be seen the red-hot skeleton of what yet stood of the last of the Vidals' ancestral dwelling.

"What does it mean?" Iris cried, knowing that her companions could not answer her. "What does it mean?"

Then she remembered, and knew that the man outside the Cathedral at Exeter, when he had spoken of a Papist gentleman and his house being levelled, had been speaking of Gervase and Vidal's Mount. Not content with throwing him into prison without just cause, this pair of zealots had come all the way from London to set fire to his house. And these things were done in the name of the Christian religion and of Him who taught love, peace, patience, long-suffering, humility! Iris could not speak her thoughts, and in shocked silence the party rode on to the gatehouse. The heavy nail-studded doors stood open, and they crossed the draw-bridge and passed without interruption beneath the trees to the courtyard. The breeze wafted smoke and sparks from the burning *débris* in their faces as still silent they came upon the scene of ruin. On the steps of the chapel, which had escaped the flames, the aged steward and retainers of the house cowered over the few miscellaneous possessions of their master which had been saved from the fire.

Cleansing Fires

In the ruddy glow cast by the smouldering mass of masonry and woodwork, Iris's eyes as they looked around her with a sickening fear fell on Zucchero's portrait of her mother with husband and child. It lay unscorched and uninjured, half wrapped in the minstrel's old cloak, on which Melpomene the yellow cat mounted guard, blinking with an air of superiority at the maimed, halt and blind animals who had been rescued from their burning infirmary.

At the sound of horses' hoofs on the stones, Master Birch came out of the chapel, leaving Father Bell kneeling before the altar.

With the weird light flickering upon him, Master Birch's round face told its own tale of anguish.

"Would to God you had not been from home to-day, sir," said he to the Esquire. "You would, I warrant, have afforded us the help in our extremity that our other neighbours in Saltern and Budleigh withheld. They came but to gape at the flames set alight by the visitors of the morning without our knowledge, but none would stir a finger to extinguish them. In their ignorance some said 'twas a just judgment of the Almighty on an accursed race. Others that 'twas fitting that witchcraft and wizardry should be thus punished by fire. Of what use to argue with people so possessed by error and a deeply-rooted prejudice of three centuries' growth? None.

Cleansing Fires

The blaze from the stable roof was wafted by the wind to the house, and the whole front on fire ere the grooms could empty their score or more of buckets upon it, and all the time men stood and looked on. A herd of tenants, tinnors, ploughboys, fisher-folk; dumb, dogged, motionless. God forgive them! Our serving-men did what they could, and Sir Gervase—Sir Gervase——” The old tutor broke off, wringing his hands.

“Gervase, my brother. Where is he?” Iris exclaimed, and again her horrified glance swept the courtyard. “Is he in the chapel?” but as she asked the question she dared not look through the open door for fear he should not be there.

Master Birch shook his head. With one hand he covered his eyes, with the other he pointed to the part of the house which had fallen into a shapeless mass of charred bricks and timber.

“Not once, but twice, thrice Sir Gervase plunged into the burning house. His first thought was for the poor brutes, then for his mother’s picture and letters, the most precious of his books, and his olpharion. These were secured as you see, and the last time he came forth his hands were burnt and his hair and face badly scorched. He would not have gone back again to wrestle with the flames had not at that moment a woman’s terrified shriek

Cleansing Fires

come from their midst. 'Twas the poor crazed creature Moll Scadding. What brought her, how she came to be there at such a crisis, we do not know; belike the fascination that 'tis said fire hath for the mad drew her to enter by the turret, the outside of which she hath haunted of late. Be that as it may, Sir Gervase would not let her perish without an effort to save her, though he knew 'twas at the extremest hazard to himself. Once we saw them through the smoke at a window; Sir Gervase seemed to urge her to jump therefrom, but could not prevail. She tore herself from his grasp and flew from him withal, and he, too, turned from the window as if to follow and bring her back. But—a crash came, a sound as of roof and floor meeting and then sinking together, and Sir Gervase—alack, we have seen him no more——”

His voice choked and died, and there was silence only broken by the wind sighing in the trees, the murmur of the sea, and the sobs of the servants. Far above, Jupiter flashed in serene splendour, and the Pleiades spangled the opal sky.

The faces of Christopher Fane and his sons, who had dismounted and stood beside their horses, blanched under their sunburn at Master Birch's narrative, in which he often halted from emotion, and they still remained speechless.

Cleansing Fires

But Iris moved a few steps nearer the dull red, sullen pile on which the moon shed her silver radiance with a kind of cold pity.

"So he is there!" she said. "There! He was not one to look on and see his house burnt to ashes. He chose rather to perish with it, as you, Hal, would go down with your ship. He gave his life for a woman, a poor mad woman. It was bravely done. Say that he was brave, my brother. Say it." She turned to them passionately for an answer, but before they could give it she went on—"We did not wait till Michaelmas; we hastened to come to-night, yet we have come too late—too late."

The upright curves of her figure drooped, she swayed, and would have fallen had there not been strong arms ready to support her. Against the same broad chest where as a little child her head had been pillowed when she was carried away from Vidal's Cove across the marsh to the Manor weeping and wailing, she now laid it in a sorrow too great for tears.

"Let us go home," she murmured, "and take with us these poor homeless men and beasts, for *his*, my brother's sake."

XXXII

TOWARDS THE SUNSET

CHRISTOPHER FANE'S elder sons had often recalled the words spoken by Sir Walter Raleigh's mother on that memorable midsummer day in their boyhood over the gate of Hayes Farm—"Remember that when the time comes only one of you may take her for a wife."

But perhaps they had never recognized so thoroughly the obvious truth of the remark till they came home from one of their longest voyages and wanderings oversea to find that Robin and Iris were husband and wife.

And as if it were not enough that Robin, the baby of the family, had married before them, they were shown lying in the dark oak cradle in which Doll had rocked them all a small thing very much alive, with a yellow downy head like a gosling, which Robin assured them with pride was his son, and old Doll declared to be the exact replica of what his father was at the same age. They were consoled for having missed the wedding by the news that they were in

Towards the Sunset

time to stand gossips at the christening ; but though they performed that office, and despite the gosling head, Iris called her boy Gervase.

After this Hal and Frank seemed to become less blind to the fact that there were other girls in the world besides Iris, and before they went to sea again both had brought a bride to their father's house—fair maidens with the clear eyes and soft fresh bloom of cheek which the famous cream and soft damp air of Devon produces in rare perfection.

That was a time when joint *ménages* were common and three generations often lived together under the same spacious roof, and so the Esquire looked forward as years went on to hearing again the echo of many pairs of pattering childish feet on the stairs and in the corridors of the Manor, and to bringing up his grandchildren, as he had brought up his sons and foster-daughter, to love horses, dogs, and birds and all country delights, and to live a free, fearless, open-air life in loving intimacy with their mother Nature and all her works.

Little Gervase was to look forward to pass his boyhood like his uncles in fishing and bathing in the blue sea, gathering shells and fossils on its beach, bird-nesting on the cliffs and in the woods, hunting stags on the moor, and flying hawks in the green dells and combes between Exe and Axe.

Towards the Sunset

When he was a year old, Iris left him for the first time to the care of his grandfather and Doll and journeyed into Dorsetshire with Robin to Sherborne, where Sir Walter Raleigh had been living with his wife and little son more or less in retirement since his liberation from the Tower after his rupture with the Queen. True to his promise Sir Walter had been present at the bridal of "Phillida and Corydon" in the old parish church of Budleigh, where he had worshipped as a boy; but since then Robin had waited a summons to attend him, and none had come till now when preparations were almost completed for the first voyage to Guiana, from which the buoyant spirit of the man so fertile in project and resource expected such great things. It was designed to be so bold and brilliant and successful a venture that it would put those of his rivals, my Lord of Essex in chief, into the 'shade, and lead to the recapture of his old position in the Queen's favour.

"Come, if thou art still so minded to be attached to my person," Sir Walter had written to Robin, "for there will certainly be soldier's work to be done and divers sorts of fighting. Her Majesty hath granted me, her servant, authority to enfeeble the King of Spain, and to discover and subdue heathen lands not in possession of any Christian prince or inhabited by any Christian people, and such, methinks, is the empire

Towards the Sunset

of Guiana." Then had followed a message from Lady Raleigh to Iris to bear her husband company to Sherborne.

Robin's blue eyes had sparkled at the thought that now he too was to have his chance of fighting the Spaniard, for of the "divers kinds of fighting" that was the only one which occurred to him; of fighting with pestilence and famine, thirst, weariness, and heart-sickness he did not think. Yet these were the enemies to which thousands had succumbed without catching one distant gleam of the fabled city, El Dorado's walls of burnished gold.

Robin and Iris arrived at Sherborne in the primrose twilight of a mild February day, when the snowdrops whitened the turf and rooks were mating in the great avenue of elms leading to the fair mansion which Sir Walter had reared on the Bishop of Sarum's confiscated estates. Around, extending for miles, were the gardens which he had laid out, rivaling the Cecils' at Theobalds for beauty, and here he had spent many blissful hours during those years of retirement with the flowers and plants he loved, as he had in the lofty library with his books. There was no sign of the discarded courtier and fallen favourite in his appearance as he received his young guests with a hearty greeting, his beautiful wife beside him. He wore his gorgeous clothes, his

Towards the Sunset

jewels and chains of pearls, with the same consummate easy grace as of yore. His colour was bright, his eyes a-kinde with unconquerable, eager hope. He stood there still at the height of his adventurous prime. His feet were not yet set on the dark, tortuous, downward paths of intrigue and reckless gambling, which led on to the gloom of his years of imprisonment and authorship, and at last to death by the headsman.

After they had supped at a sumptuously-served table, Iris was alone with Lady Raleigh and her children in her own spacious chamber, with bay-windows opening to the south on a rich and undulating country, and the two friends looked lovingly into each other's eyes, and each found the other lovelier than when they last met. Elizabeth's face was rounder in outline and had lost the scared expression which the constant dread of discovery had often imprinted on it at Court. With her chubby baby in her arms and little Wat clinging to her skirts, she was the picture of bright, fair young motherhood. Elizabeth thought Iris less elfin and more womanly in her beauty. It seemed to her now as if the tragic destinies of her father and brother lay in the depths of her eyes and accounted for their melancholy; but smiles flitted about her mouth, and she mimicked merrily for her friend's benefit Gervase's bady voice

Towards the Sunset

and ways, to show that she too had a son to be proud of. When Lady Raleigh had handed her boys over to their nurse, she became more thoughtful and said with a sigh—

“Oh, these happy times. Would they could have always lasted. How it hath delighted me to see him, my husband, content to build and garden here in this dear place, and only to leave it and me to go to London for the Parliament sittings, or to make short journeys into Cornwall. But then a year ago he began to set his face towards the sunset again, and I knew 'twould end, this peace and happiness. First he sent out Captain Whiddon and his devoted Kemys to find the golden empire of which he dreams; but they have come back, having found naught but Red Indians, and so he must needs go himself. 'Tis the business of the voyage that fills him now. All else is forgot. Why must he go? To win again the Queen's grace? Better for me that it should be lost for ever. Fain would I that he had never heard of this Guiana, for I feel such forebodings that the quest for more riches will end the season of my contentment, if 'tis not ended already. Aye, if men would but be satisfied as we poor women are with happiness. But I talk all of myself and my fears. Tell me, sweet one, art *thou* happy?”

Towards the Sunset

Iris turned her face up to her friend with her brightest smile flashing upon it.

"Why ask? I have got Robin. Robin and I have always loved one another since we were five years old. He is as dear a husband as ever he was a brother."

"But Sir Walter is taking him away from you. He will draw Robin too with him towards the sunset. Have not you too forebodings?"

"The ships will come back," said Iris. "I know they will come back. I can see into the future, but I would fain not see further than the point where 'tis fairest."

"And where is that point, and when reached?" Lady Raleigh asked, taking Iris's hand affectionately in hers.

Her eyes wandered with the old dreamy look from the window into the darkling landscape. From the terrace below came curls of smoke from Raleigh's familiar silver-bowled pipe, his Devonshire bur mingled with Robin's fresh boyish laugh, and through the mild February night glowed the feathers and beads and tawny skin of one of Captain Whiddon's Red Indians.

"'Twill be, I think," Iris answered slowly, "after they have voyaged back from the sunset, when belike Sir Walter will grant Robin land on his Lismore

Towards the Sunset

estate in Ireland. Then we shall go to dwell in the green country—my own country——” Her hand was withdrawn and clasped the amulet on her bosom.

“Then, then,” she went on in a low, soft voice, “I shall kiss at last the earth beneath which my mother lies, by the little lake where the banshee moans far away in the dark hills.”

THE END

—2—

RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
BREAD STREET HILL, E.C., AND
BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

[illegible]

